

China

T O U R I S M

CHINA-WIDE SPECIAL

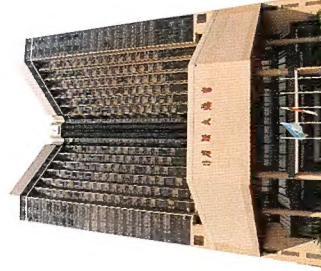
The Length and Breadth of China — A Year's Journeying
Narrow-Gauge Railways of Southern Yunnan
Around Taihu by Bike
New Year at Labrang Lamasery
The Hong Kong-Beijing Coach Tour

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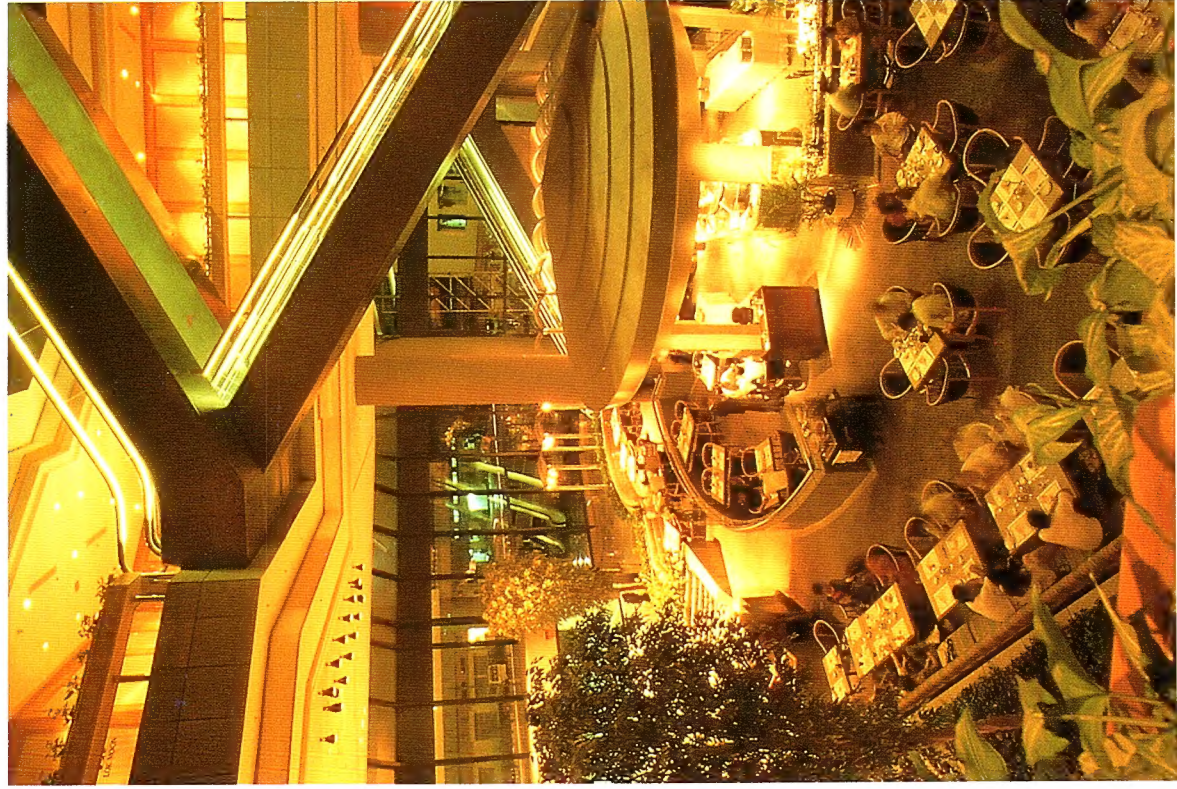


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EDITORIAL

Destination Extraordinary

By the time you read this, it will be a new year — 1991 — and New Year is inevitably an occasion to assess the situation to date and try to gauge what the future may hold. This is just as true for China and its tourist industry.

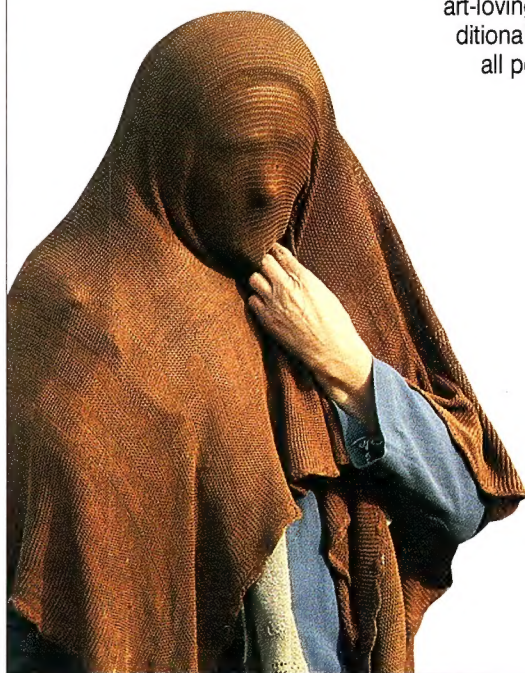
Yet, whatever the troubles of the industry during the past year, China still offers a truly stunning range of options for tourists and travellers. In this issue we pinpoint just a few of them (not all of them open as yet to non-Chinese).

Thus, we follow the adventures of two young Chinese men who chose to convert a minibus for a year-long 'Grand Tour' of their own country. In another article we discover Lake Taihu. This low-lying fertile area in the southeastern provinces of Jiangsu and Zhejiang offers just the right degree of challenge for a pair of holidaying cyclists.

More than railway buffs will find plenty to interest them in our article on the two little-known narrow-gauge railways in the south of Yunnan. The first of these was built by French engineers in 1910 as an extension from Hanoi in Vietnam, at that time under French rule.

A new direction in Chinese tourism last year was the launch — on May 1, 1990 — of a pioneering 23-day overland coach tour from Hong Kong to Beijing. If it proves successful, it will have enormous significance for the further extension of such tours for foreigners.

We also report on the Monlam or Great Prayer Festival in southern Gansu at Labrang Lamasery, one of the six major religious centres of the Yellow Sect of Tibetan Buddhism. And, as you read of the festivities at Labrang, which coincide with the Spring Festival or Lunar New Year of the Han Chinese, please accept our very best wishes for a healthy and prosperous Year of the Goat, which starts on February 15, 1991. May the sensitive, art-loving goat (according to Traditional Chinese belief) bring us all peace and harmony in the year ahead!



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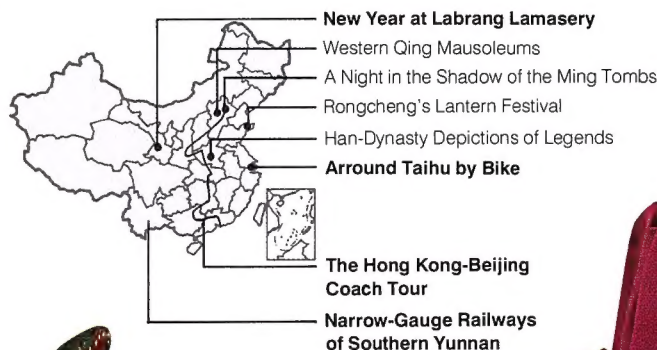
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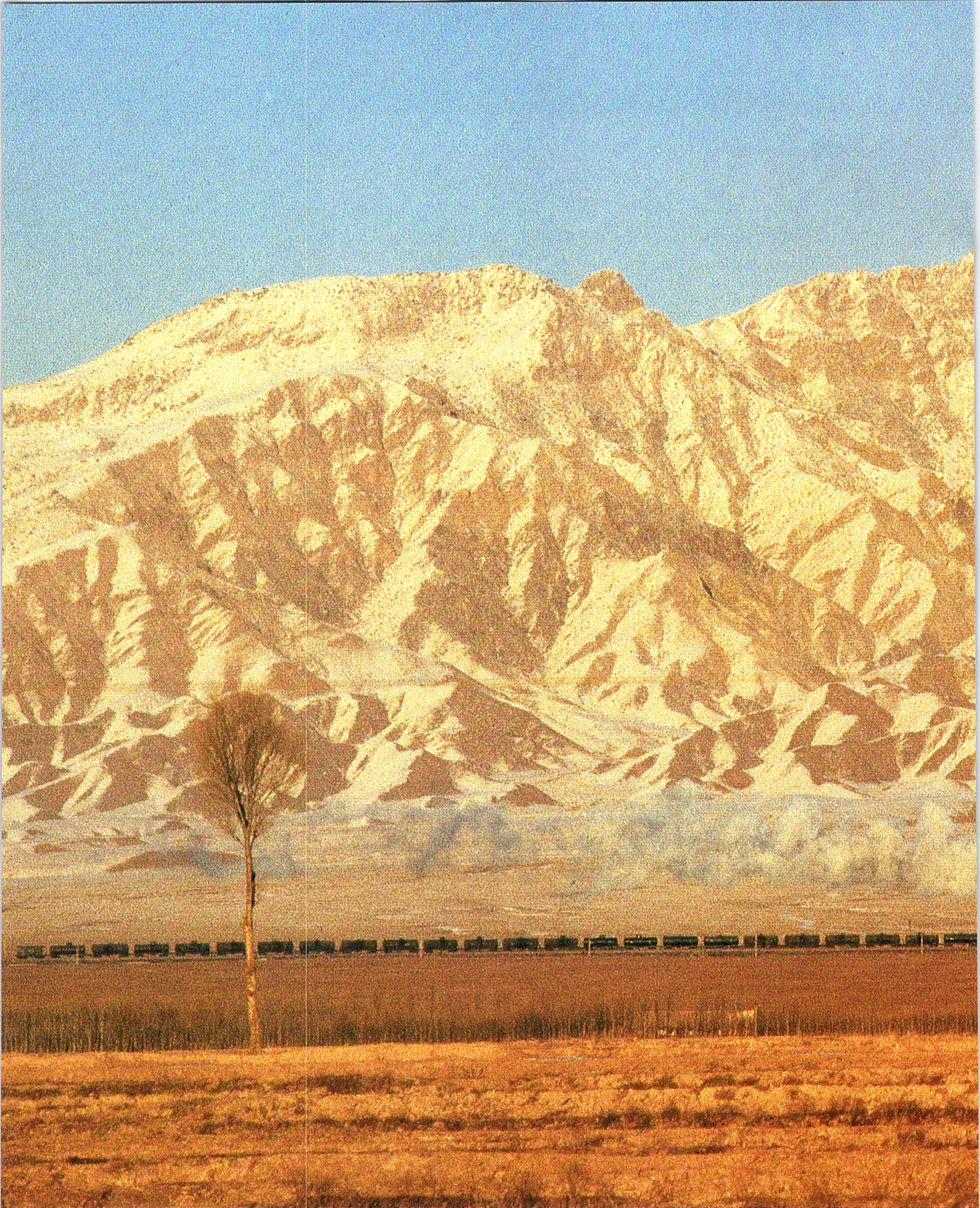
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CHINA-WIDE

SPECIAL

The Length and Breadth of



Instead of the camel caravans which once plodded ponderously through the Gansu Corridor in northwestern Gansu Province, it is now the train which thunders through carrying goods and passengers.

China – A Year's Journeying

PHOTOS & ARTICLE
BY CHU XIAOQING



Editor's note: A couple of years ago, the writer of this article spent a whole year driving a minibus all over China. Here he presents some of the most beautiful and interesting impressions and images captured along the way against the background of his gruelling itinerary.

My friend Xiaohua and I had planned to drive around China for a year in a minibus. One of our most important preparations was to remember to pack the sleeping bags so that, when necessary, we could sleep in our converted minibus. Quite contrary to normal practice, our route deliberately took us to the south when the days were really hot and to the north at the coldest time of year. This, of course, meant that we were going out of our way to court hardship but, in so doing, we were sure to see the most representative side of these places.

June 1 1988. Our journey started from Lishui in southern Zhejiang. We climbed to the summit of a mountain pass on the Zhejiang-Fujian border and slept in the minibus that first night in order to catch the sunrise. But the dawn proved to be nothing special — not an auspicious start. Disappointed, we drove downhill and went south along the Fujian coastal highway. At Xiamen, we turned north and were in the Wuyi Mountains on the northern border of Fujian by June 14. We kept going north through Jiangxi via Jingdezhen, Nanchang and Mount Lushan to Wuhan, capital of Hubei.

It was June 26 and getting hot, so we turned back down south. As we were leaving Yueyang in northern Hunan at noon on July 2, the bulb of the thermometer in the bus burst as a result of the extreme heat. That month, the mercury rose above the maximum 50°C marked on the glass rod. Anxiously, we opened our bags to check our stocks only to find our cold cure capsules glued together, while the chocolate bars in our food case had melted all over the other things! A tape had twisted in the heat and refused to go into the recorder. But what worried us most was the thought that our colour film might have been damaged; we had to wait quite a while before we knew whether it was O.K. or not.

Lake Dongting, with an area of 2,820 square kilometres, is the second largest freshwater lake in China. Located to the southwest of Yueyang in Hunan Province, it contains numerous islands, the best-known of which is Junshan. Not only is this island one of the few places where the 'mottled bamboo' grows, it also grows the famous Yinzhen ('silver needle') tea.





Guangdong in the south is one of China's most progressive provinces. Its more than fifty million people are known for their quick wits, business acumen and resourcefulness. The latter is particularly in evidence in this solution to a family outing on wheels!



The Shenzhen Special Economic Zone has experienced spectacular growth since its creation in 1980. Its location just north of Hong Kong and its towering skyscrapers have given it a reputation as Hong Kong's 'little sister'. Many people from the interior dream of working there: wages are higher, the lifestyle is more modern ... and this is China's southern gateway to the world.



Deep South

From Hunan we skirted the Jinggang Mountains on the border with Jiangxi and entered Guangdong, passing through Guangzhou and Shenzhen. At Shekou we and our minibus took the ferry to Zhuhai (north of Macau) from where, on August 14, we reached Hainan Island, now Hainan Province.

By then both of us were looking rather strange. Since I had been sitting on the same side of the minibus for more than two months straight, the right side of my face and right arm were tanned dark while the rest of me was pale. Xiaohua presented a mirror image....

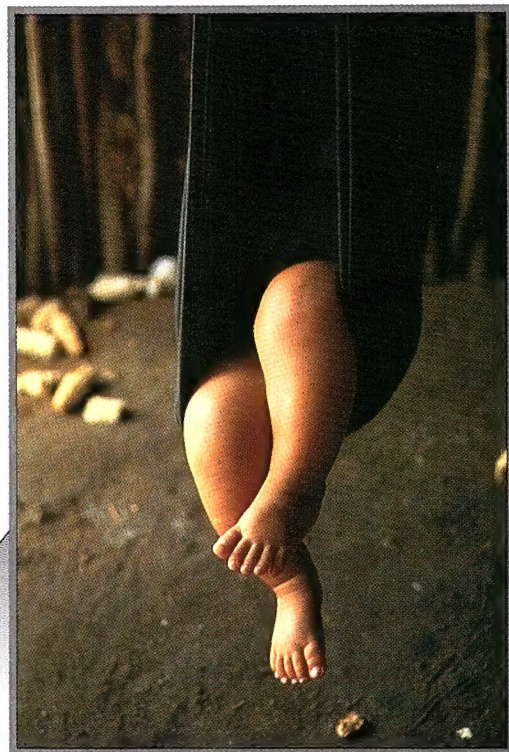
On August 18 we stayed in the Changjiang Li Autonomous County in western Hainan. The following day we climbed a hill to visit a Li village. Under tall coconut palms stood a row of thatched cottages; by a fence a sunburnt child was playing with a puppy. One of the local men signalled to another child who shinned up a tree in no time and dropped a few coconuts on to the ground. The milk was cool and refreshing, very welcome on such a hot day. The man told us that coconut milk is sweeter and the flesh more tender before noon.

On the morning of August 21 we set out on a circuit of the island, travelling south to Sanya at the southernmost tip of Hainan Island before taking the central route back to Haikou, the provincial capital on the north coast, where we took the ferry back to the mainland.

At six o'clock in the morning of the following day we started out again, driving across the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region from south to north before turning west to enter Guizhou via Hunan Province.

Not far from Kaili in eastern Guizhou we started to pass many gorgeously dressed girls of the Miao and Dong nationalities on the road. We followed them to a slope crowded with people. A bullfight was in progress, popular entertainment for the local minority peoples on festive occasions. As we watched a bout, one of two bulls was beaten by the other in only two rounds, which caused some derisive laughter from the spectators. As if irritated, the loser suddenly stood up again with a jerk, waved its horns and gored its unsuspecting rival, which was forced up into the air on its hind legs. The umpire and the bulls' owners, see-

A baby dozes in a leather hammock slung from the branch of a tree. Paradise? Not quite, but a reflection of the laid-back lifestyle of the Li people of Hainan Island, China's newest province in the Beibu Gulf. This island, formerly part of Guangdong, enjoys a tropical climate and has vast forests, a central mountain chain and lovely, still largely undeveloped beaches.



The Dai people are an important minority nationality centred in Xishuangbanna in the tropical southwestern corner of Yunnan Province. Devout Buddhists, the Dai are followers of the Hinayana Sect. These women laden with woven fishtraps will later sell their catch at the nearest market.



Harvesting the rice crop is the busiest time of year for the farmers of Yunnan. All the community turns out to help. The unusual element in this picture is the zebra, wearing a halter and bridle, which waits patiently in a corner of the paddy field until its services as a draught animal are required. This bizarre scene was captured near Shilin, the famous 'stone forest' in Lunan County.

In Daluo, again in Xishuangbanna, on the Sino-Burmese border, the Bulang people live a largely outdoor life. This minority is closely related to the Va and Benglong. In October it is still so sultry that the men and older women go semi-naked much of the time. The kids dispense with clothing altogether! But they never leave off their prized jewellery of solid silver.



ing that things had gone wrong, rushed forward to try to separate the beasts but were too late. The supposed loser was so angry that it charged repeatedly as the other one tried to sneak away. Leaving the ring, the two chased all over the hillside, whisking close by me and scattering the onlookers.

We cut across Guizhou to Kunming, capital of Yunnan Province, then continued southwest to Xishuangbanna in order to catch the Water Splashing Festival on October 3. That afternoon proceedings started with delicate sprinklings with twigs dipped in water but soon escalated to cups, basins or even pails of water being poured or thrown around!

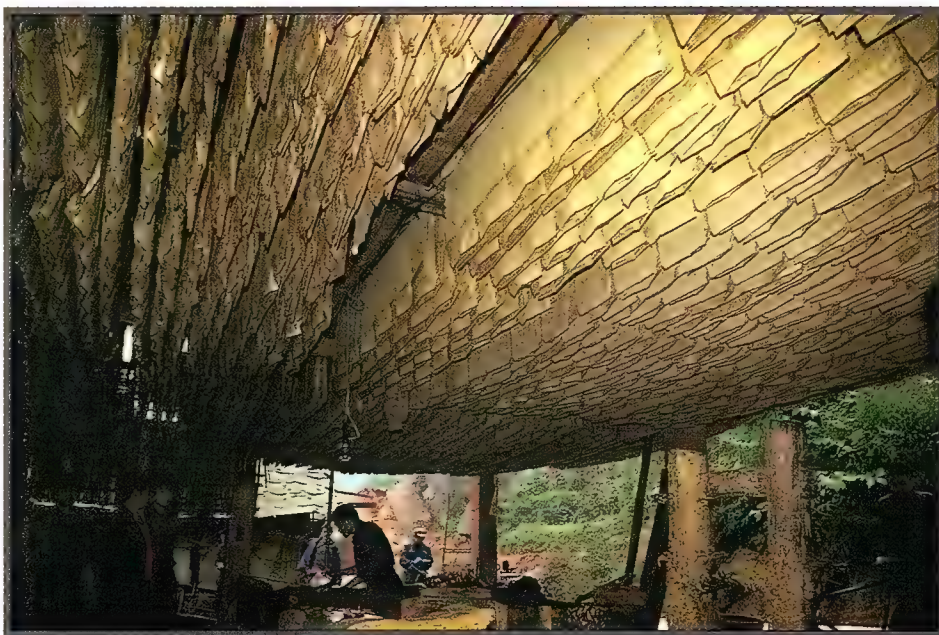
Our next stop was the small township of Daluo on the Sino-Burmese border where we visited the two-storeyed bamboo and wooden houses of the Dai and Bulang peoples and made a sortie into the famous rain forests. Heading north again, we visited the Mosuo (a branch of the Naxi people) and the Pumi at Lake Lugu, northeast of Lijiang, straddling the border with Sichuan. There we called on some households and feasted on fish from the lake. We intended to take a boat out to explore the islands in the lake but were dissuaded by the head of the Ninglang Yi Autonomous County who kindly came in person to let us know of heavy floods and landslides along the road by which we had come. He urged us to leave immediately as otherwise we might be stuck there for two weeks or more.

We packed up and left, following his car. At the cave-in, he got into a bulldozer and directed the driver in the pouring rain. It took around forty minutes before we and the few other waiting vehicles were able to get through the landslide section. But our troubles were not over yet. Not far ahead the river was in spate all over the road. Luckily, among the other vehicles there was a jeep which pulled our minibus while everybody else got out and pushed, and we eventually got through.

Northward Bound

North we continued, across the Liangshan Mountains and through Sichuan into Shaanxi. We reached the provincial capital, Xi'an, on November 13. Some money we were expecting failed to arrive so, to save our rapidly diminishing funds, we decided to sleep out in a small wood beside the River Yulin.

Xishuangbanna is a place of and for the exotic: its tropical ambience, its plethora of minority peoples, often with links to neighbouring countries, its temples in the Burmese style.... Its rain forests contain many rare plants and trees and shelter a bewildering variety of birds and animals.



Beside the 'Ancient Trail of Shu' (Shu being the old name for Sichuan Province), a traditional paper mill carries on, unaffected by modern technology. This drying shed is one stage in the progress of turning out the hand-made paper beloved by painters and calligraphers.

Shaanxi Province is often associated with images of the loess plateau, that expanse of 'yellow earth' which stretches over vast areas of northern China. This was one of the cradles of Chinese civilization, thanks partly to the fertility and malleability of this soil, and many of the present-day inhabitants still live in cave-dwellings excavated from the loess. Near Hancha in the north of the province, shepherds drive their flocks home from market.



Wuzhong, close to the right bank of the Huanghe (Yellow River) in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, is an important trading centre. Its range of footwear is said to be the best and most extensive in the northwest.





As night fell, from deep in the wood came the plaintive cries of birds. We turned on the headlights and later went out searching with a torch, but found nothing. We selected a nice spot to park and settled down for the night inside our minibus. But it got colder and colder and I kept waking up.... It was ten degrees below zero. Somehow we managed to get through the night. We were preparing to leave at dawn after little sleep when all of a sudden we heard wild geese honking overhead. A skein of them flew over slowly in an inverted V formation. They were flying south towards the warmth but we resolutely set our faces north, seeking the cold.

We drove to Dianshi via Hengshan in the far north of the province. Under the blue sky of the loess plateau, with flocks of sheep white against the background of the yellow earth, we heard a shepherd singing far off in the distance.

As we drove on, our vehicle raised a cloud of the dust that lay twenty to thirty centimetres deep on some sections of the road. It soon insinuated its way through the cracks and crevices of our vehicle so that, looking into the mirror, we could barely recognize ourselves.

We spent that night in a cave-dwelling. After supper, as we were gossiping with a few of the locals, we heard folk songs echoing from the next cave, interspersed with lots of laughter. I took my tape recorder and went off hopefully, finding a group of middle-aged men singing songs — happy and sad — without accompaniment. The voices lingered in the dim cave.

The next day we went to the township of Hancha, east of Hengshan, to attend a live-stock market. At the market, apart from buying and selling, people were flocking to watch an opera performance. The stage was set up at the bottom of a gully by the river and people watched from the opposite bank or wherever they could find a vantage point — on the slopes, on top of the cave-dwellings.... There was a lot of wind that day, blowing up dust like smoke on a battlefield. The sound of the gongs and drums of the troupe mingled strangely with the neighing of horses, braying of donkeys and bleating of sheep!

After Hancha we drove westwards along the Great Wall until we came in sight of some beautiful sand-dunes. We were on the





The Gansu Corridor on the old Silk Road had always been an important conduit for migrating peoples, for armies on the march, for trading caravans, and for cultural exchanges with points further west. Its cities today are still oases, but many more have been swallowed up by the shifting sands over the centuries.

The ancient city of Heishui (Black Water), fifteen kilometres northwest of Zhangye, is said to have been a military outpost in early times. The ruins, traversed by the Lanzhou-Yecheng Highway, measure about two kilometres from east to west and 2.5 kilometres from north to south and contain tombs, a ruined village and a fortress. Relics found so far date back to the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220), but there is much more research to be done before we unravel the mysteries of this settlement.



At the far northwestern end of the Gansu Corridor lies one of those sites which have aroused the interest and enthusiasm of art-lovers all over the world – the ancient Mogao Grottoes at Dunhuang and their magnificent murals on Buddhist themes. Six kilometres south of Dunhuang, the towering Mingsha (Whistling Sand) Dunes present the exotic winter combination of sands and snow.



periphery of the Mu Us Shamo, a desert stretching over an area of 25,000 square kilometres. Most of it lies within the territory of Inner Mongolia, but as the desert is moving ever southward, it encroaches in places on the Great Wall in northern Shaanxi. The wind here was so strong that, if we left the windows open, we could hardly breathe.

We drove right to the end of a side road several kilometres from the town of Anbianbu. This is the northwestern tip of Shaanxi Province, close to the borders with Ningxia and Inner Mongolia. We got out and stared around at the desert stretching as far as the eye could see. What was our surprise to hear dogs barking and, a moment later, to identify a column of blue smoke rising into the sky. People living out here? Indeed, further off in a gully, we found four people who looked as though they were all members of one family. They had absolutely no water supply where they lived — difficult for most of us to imagine. Pointing at their five hectares of land, they told us: 'What can we do? This is our land.' Their drinking water has to be fetched from the other side of the Great Wall — a distance of four kilometres each way. It dawned on me that the many donkey carts we had passed on the road must have been coming to this very place.

First Snow

We followed the road west along the Great Wall, across the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and into Gansu Province. On December 7 we left Lanzhou, the provincial capital, and set out through the Gansu Corridor, the panhandle between mountains and deserts which leads to Xinjiang and China's far northwest.

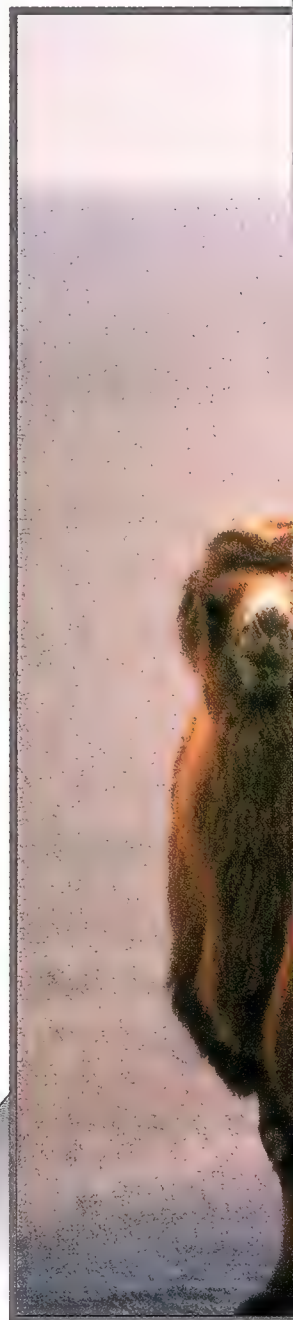
As we drove across the Wushaoling Pass, we were faced with a vast expanse of white. Snowflakes were whirling in the wind as I got out and grabbed a handful of snow. It was different from the snow with which I am familiar from further south in China; that is much wetter — good for making snowballs. Here, in the northwest, a handful of snowflakes remained just snowflakes even after I squeezed it hard.

This was the coldest day of our journey so far. The northwesterlies were howling around us, finding their way inside the minibus from all directions. Many people had warned us that we had chosen the

The Uygurs are the 'majority minority' of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. This immense tract of territory — one-sixth of China — has wooded mountains in the north, along the border with the Soviet Union, but its true heart is the Taklimakan Desert of fearsome reputation. North and south of the desert lie a string of oasis cities with illustrious names. The furthest west of them is Kashi (Kashgar), the fabled destination of many foreign explorers and travellers in centuries gone by. Most of the Uygur women there are veiled in accordance with Moslem custom.



Although cars and lorries are now a common sight on the roads of Xinjiang, you do still come across the string of camels. These animals are perfectly adapted to the rigours of the desert climate and can carry heavy loads of goods across difficult terrain. This herd, encountered between Hami and Ürümqi, was returning from grazing and was skittish about motor vehicles. The photo had to be taken with a 500mm lens.





Much of Qinghai, that vast and inhospitable region stretching between Gansu and Tibet, is covered with deserts and salt lakes. The town of Golmud, in the centre of the province, was built in 1954 in connect with the construction of the Qinghai-Tibet Highway. But even here, just on the outskirts of the town, measures are necessary to stabilize the wind-blown sand and prevent the further encroachment of the desert.





wrong season for a trip here, but we were prepared to brave any climatic rigours if only to see the true face of the great northwest in winter — a face of beauty, magnificence and even serenity (when the wind died down!).

December 13. We turned into the longest straight road we encountered on our journey ... which by this point had already covered 20,000 kilometres. This was the Dunhuang-Liuyuan Highway, which stretched without end before us. December 16 found us in Ürümqi, capital of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. We now had to face up to some of the time constraints placed on us. We had planned to spend the Spring Festival — the Lunar New Year — in Heilongjiang. Since we were now in the far northwest and Heilongjiang Province is in China's far northeast, we had eight provinces and regions and a distance of some 6,000 kilometres still before us. We had to step on it. But we could not bear to leave without seeing Kashi in the far west of Xinjiang, the 'last stop' before Pakistan.

On December 30 1988, we started back as fast as we could, considering the road conditions. As we were approaching Qijiao-jing, still some way short of Hami in eastern Xinjiang, a violent storm came with gusts so strong that our vehicle rocked as though it might turn over at any moment. The sand hit the body and windows with a sound like a whiplash. We slowed down at once. If the windows broke under the onslaught, we would really be in trouble. I had a vivid image of us trying to navigate in safety helmets and goggles!

Not far from Hami, we drove through the Gobi Desert. Here there was no road as such; all we could do was follow the signs left by the vehicles which had passed this way before. The temperature plummeted. At five o'clock one morning we got stuck and, of course, there was nowhere to go for help. It took us half an hour to dig ourselves out of trouble. And, as we dug, the wind blew the sand relentlessly into our mouth, eyes, jacket pockets....

We entered Qinghai Province in early January 1989. After we had turned onto the asphalted road leading to Da Qaidam, still thirty kilometres off, we spotted glistening lights up ahead, so bright we wondered if they could be the eyes of a pack of wolves (don't laugh — they do exist up here). But



The Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, a great swathe of grasslands and deserts across northern China, is bitterly cold in winter. On the way from Dongsheng to Ejinhoru Banner on the Ordos Plateau, close to the mausoleum of Genghis Khan, we saw children playing happily on a river which was frozen solid.





the lights seemed to get no closer, however far we drove. Finally, of course, we caught up with them to find that they were indeed the lights of our destination. Lights can be seen for enormous distances in the flat, featureless Gobi. At this stage we were skirting the northern rim of the Qaidam Basin.

Northeastern Winter

Still eager to meet our deadline, we drove fast across northern China, passing Beijing without stopping and reaching Harbin in Heilongjiang on January 31. Our destination was the Shuangfeng (Twin Peak) Forestry Centre, which we reached on New Year's Eve by the lunar calendar. This is in the heart of the timber zone in Hailin County, just west of the city of Mudanjiang.

To get there, we had to abandon our faithful minibus and take the forest train ... the place was snowbound! As the train pulled into the station, we saw local residents clearing away the snow which lay two metres deep in places. People were waiting on the road to board the train or meet relatives coming for the celebrations. The railway is the main line of communication in the winter since it has a special maintenance gang and trains run every day, keeping the line open. As long as the locals have a path cleared between their homes and the railway station, they are in contact with the world at large. This is also apparently one of the reasons why houses are built alongside the railway line.

That evening we gulped down our evening meal, impatient to take photos of the firework display to be held later. The village presented a charming spectacle, with red lanterns hanging in front of every home, their light glowing on the snow-covered ground warming the heart.

The warmth, of course, was purely psychological! We stayed out in the severe cold for about forty minutes in the interests of photography until the metallic parts of our cameras stuck to our faces as our breath turned to ice.

We stayed in Heilongjiang for the first month of the lunar year — a much-needed break — before resuming our journey. On February 23, having traversed Jilin, Liaoning and Hebei, we re-entered Beijing.

Our plans, however, soon saw us further west, heading towards the Taihang Mountains in eastern Shanxi. The moun-

Heilongjiang in the far northeast borders on Siberia. Early February is the coldest part of the winter there (the province has sub-zero temperatures for over half the year!). The forest shrouded in deep snow has an ethereal beauty, although the watery sunshine makes little impression. Skiing is being developed in this province, which has much to offer hunters, anglers and lovers of the great outdoors.



For anything up to five months of the winter, Jingpo (Mirror) Lake in southern Heilongjiang freezes to the depth of one metre and more. The local fishermen have to cut holes in the ice to fish. At the time of the Spring Festival, a place by the frozen lake becomes a gigantic public fairground enlivened by performances staged by yangko folk song and dance troupes. Everybody joins in this traditional welcome to the new year.



A desolate, denuded winter landscape on a dirt road which links Lingchuan in southern Shanxi with Zhengzhou, capital of Henan. Despite its rough and ready surface and tight zigzag bends, this road makes a very useful shortcut through the chain of the Taihang Mountains.



The rhythmic thud of pickaxes falling in unison, the shouts and shrill whistles of the supervisor.... We came across a team of workers toiling along the railway track as we were traversing Shandong Province in eastern China. At this point we were not far from Qufu, the ancient town famous as the birthplace of the philosopher Confucius (552-479 B.C.) and home to countless generations of his family.

tains here struck us as less imposing than those of western China, but very steep. In many places, we found ourselves driving along the bottom of a gully less than thirty metres wide. From inside the minibus we were unable to see the sky. Elsewhere, our vehicle skirted the edge of a precipice several hundred metres high. Mercifully, we could not see what was below. When we did take the time to stop and have a look, we wished we hadn't: the sight of the abyss falling away made us feel dizzy.

We stopped to explore the township of Magedang in Lingchuan County in south-eastern Shanxi. This is a world of stone: stone houses, stone walls, stone mills and stone troughs. The day we were there has stayed in my memory because it rained ... the first rain we had experienced since leaving Shaanxi's Xi'an nearly four months before!

The Circle Completed

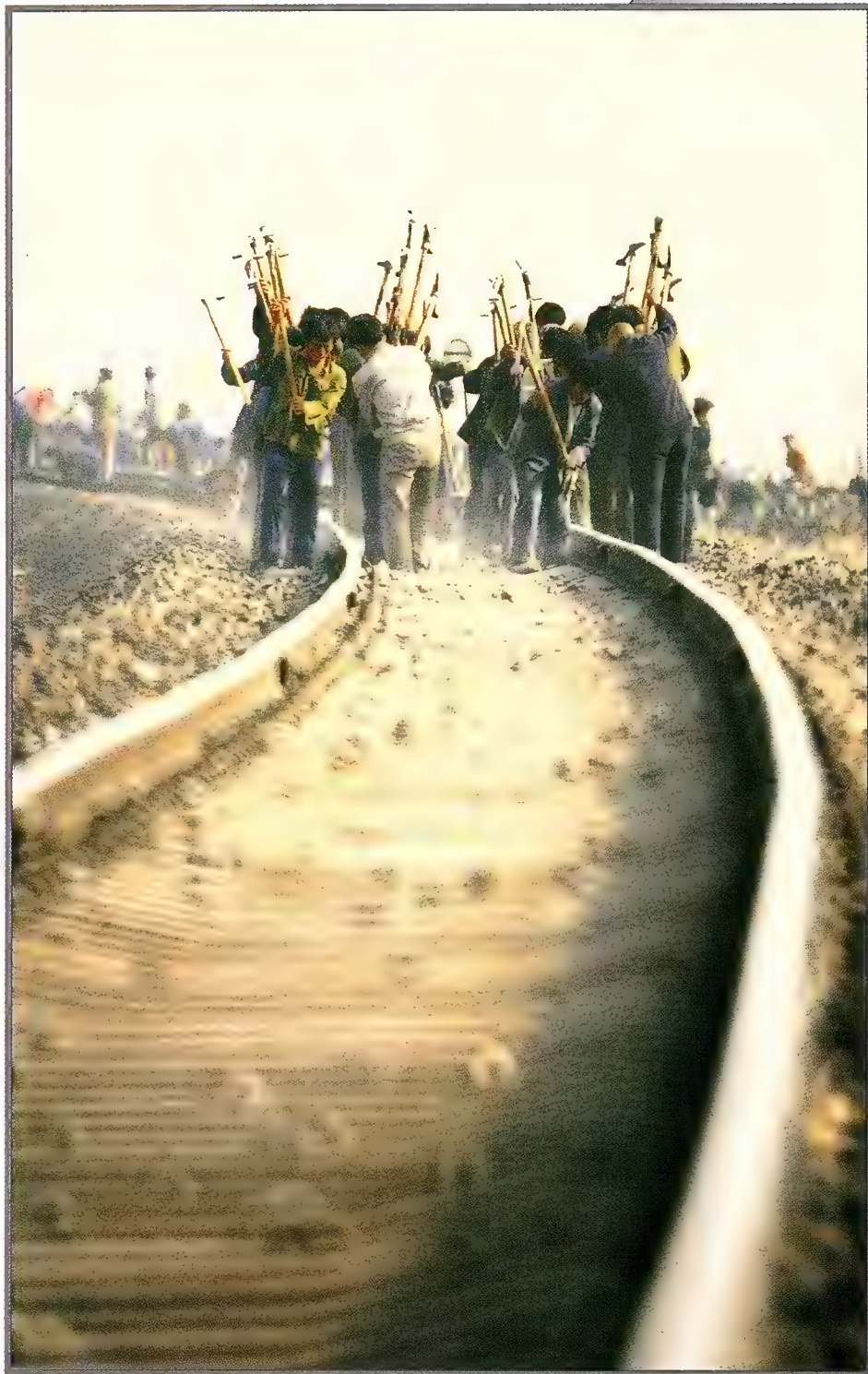
We reached Zhengzhou, Henan's capital, and then made a huge loop back towards the east, touching on Shandong, Jiangsu, Shanghai and northern Zhejiang before arriving in Yixian County in Anhui Province on May 9 1989.

This county at the southwestern foot of the famous Mount Huangshan is hemmed in by mountains and rivers. Owing to poor (until recently, non-existent) communication facilities, it has preserved a certain distance from the outside world. Strolling through one of its villages, we sighted many dwellings in the typical style of Anhui. To this day the county boasts over four thousand houses dating from the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties in dozens of villages. The overall ambience of the past survives to a considerable extent, since much of the furniture and furnishings are also antiques. We climbed a hill to get a bird's-eye view over the village, set among green fields. The charms of this region of China, hidden for so long, are now starting to become more widely known.

On May 16, we and our minibus took to the road again, returning east to Zhejiang where, on May 31, we arrived at Hangzhou, the provincial capital and our home base. Our grand tour had covered 40,000 kilometres and had taken us exactly 365 days.



Translated by Ren Jiazhen



A totally different face of China can be found in the waterside villages and towns of the Yangtse: in other words, Anhui, southern Jiangsu and Zhejiang.



The village of Hongcun in southern Anhui's Yixian County makes an unforgettable and charming picture as it nestles beside Lake Nanhu. The high 'mare's head' gables on the whitewashed houses typical of the region are particularly elegant.





CHINA-WIDE
SPECIAL

Narrow-Gauge Railways



of Southern Yunnan

ARTICLE BY DENG YAOZE

A friend in Yunnan once said to me: 'The train here is slower than a car.' I just laughed, assuming he was joking, but I now realize that he was referring to the two narrow-gauge railways in southern Yunnan. One of these runs between Kunming and Hekou; it has a one-metre-wide track and is hence known as the *migui* or 'metre-gauge' line. The other is the metre-gauge Mengzi-Baoxiu Line, which has a branch track between Gejiu and Jijie with a gauge of only sixty centimetres.

The Metre-Gauge Line

I boarded the metre-gauge line at Kunming North Railway Station, the northern terminus of the Kunming-Hekou Line. The carriages are of course smaller — both lower and narrower — than those of an ordinary train. Leaving the station at 10:45 pm, the train set out for Kaiyuan two hundred kilometres to the south. It would take only half a day for a public bus to cover such a distance, yet we chugged along all night and arrived at our destination after daybreak. So I suppose one could really say that the train is slower than a car!

As the central point on the metre-gauge line, Kaiyuan has a museum ... the Exhibition Hall of the History of the Narrow-Gauge Railway in Yunnan. There I learned more about the origin of this railway line. It is a fascinating story.

During the last years of the Qing dynasty, as a result of treaties signed with the imperial court, France — which



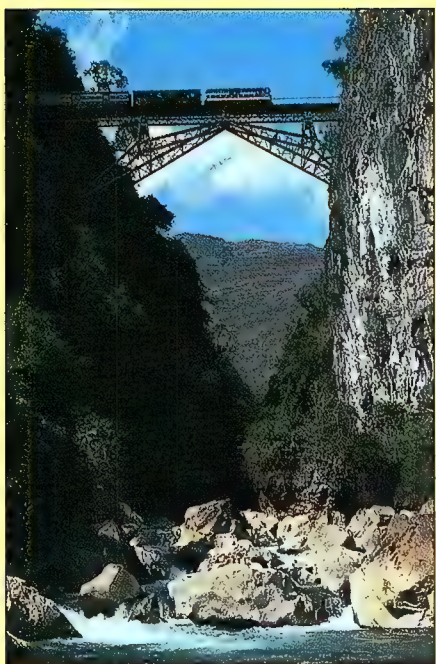
then controlled parts of Indochina — obtained the right to construct a railway in order to open up trading channels and exploit Yunnan's natural resources, in particular its copper, tin and timber. The Yunnan section of the Hanoi-Kunming Railway, construction of which was started from the Hanoi end in 1898, was opened in 1910. It was the first railway built in Yunnan. The line was under French management until 1943.

Through Gorges and Jungle

The train from Kaiyuan to Hekou only has hard-seat carriages. Soon after leaving the station, the train started to wind its way through culverts as it climbed higher. Laid along the foothills of the Ailao Mountains, the line has to cross mountains, traverse gorges, overcome sharp bends and steep slopes. The steepest angle is said to be 31.5 degrees, and the radius of the sharpest curve only one hundred metres. To cope with the terrain, over a hundred bridges had to be built along this section of the line.

As the train snaked its way over an iron bridge, I was told a story connected with this very bridge. It seems that the French engineer in charge of bridge construction was at his wit's end as to how to overcome the difficult topography at this point. One evening, while walking along the river bank, he accidentally dropped a pair of scissors which landed and stood, points down and apart, in the sand. Eureka! That gave him his inspiration — he built a





4

Previous page: The narrow-gauge tracks run parallel at Jijie (by Xu Puyan).

Miao people wait to take a train at Wantang in the Pingbian Miao Autonomous County (1); another way of getting home (3)! Tobacco stalls usually offer free smokes (2). Everyone pulls back off the tracks at Luogu as a train rolls in (5) (1, 2 and 5 by Wu Jialin). One of the many spectacular bridges between Kaiyuan and Hekou (4) (3 and 4 by Xu Puyan).

5





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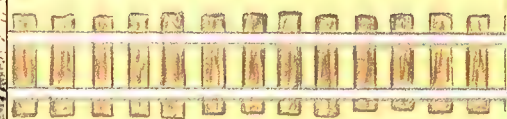


3



2

The carriages on the 'inch track' are a tight squeeze (1). A pointsman on the inch track (2); the ancient engine is given a thorough overhaul every two weeks (4). The end of the line at Hekou on the Sino-Vietnamese border (6) (2, 4 and 6 by Wu Jialin). The French-style Bizezhai Station in Mengzi (3), and a station between Jijie and Gejiu (5) (1, 3 and 5 by Xu Puyan).





bridge with straddled supports. The real bridge designer was a Frenchman, but this tale is almost certainly apocryphal. Still, it's a nice story....

There is a station almost every eight kilometres between Kaiyuan and Hekou. The train stops at every station and the passengers mostly travel short distances, generally only a couple of stations. They take the train in the morning to go shopping, consult the doctor or visit friends, and return by the train in the evening. Passengers and train staff greet each other by name like old friends.

Market on the Tracks

At the station of Zangcun, I noticed a local curiosity. Since this part of Yunnan is mountainous and so thickly wooded, it is difficult for the local people to find any flat space on which to set up their market stalls. Stations offer the perfect solution. Since the train travels so slowly, as soon as the traders see it coming they pack up their things and move away. Then, once the train has departed, they start wheeling and dealing anew, both on the platform and on the actual track.

This is a good choice for another reason. The people here live in widely scattered communities, and the train is

their major means of transport. When they gather at the railway stations, they offer a captive market for the traders.

There is a rich variety of goods — vegetables, fruit, grain, poultry, bamboowares, articles made from wood, pottery, mountain produce, medicinal herbs and so on. Tobacco, too. In front of the stalls selling tobacco there is generally an array of bamboo pipes so that prospective buyers can try out the tobacco first, free of charge.

Since many people have to come to market from a long way away, station workers rent out beds in their own homes as lodgings to earn extra money. The walls of the station were covered with all kinds of advertisements, including some for an 'anti-sterility' product and another combatting bad breath!

The southern terminus of the metre-gauge line is Hekou (River Mouth), which is located where the River Nanxi meets the River Yuanjiang, also called the Honghe (Red River), before flowing into Vietnam. The town, the centre of the Hekou Yao Autonomous County, is thus separated from Vietnam purely by a ribbon of water.



Not far from the railway station is the iron bridge which once took trains across the Honghe. This bridge was destroyed during the border conflict of 1979 and has not yet been rebuilt. Its broken frame is rusty and covered with weeds. With the suspension of the train service, bamboo rafts are used to transport passengers over the river. Each carries at most four or five persons, who stand upright, their feet under water, so that they look rather like deities (maybe the Eight Immortals?) gliding without visible effort towards the opposite bank.

Introducing the 'Inch Track'

I myself doubled back since I wanted to explore the other narrow-gauge railway line.

In 1912, forty-eight industrialists and businessmen involved in the exploitation of Yunnan's tin mines presented a petition to Cai E, military governor of Yunnan at that time, asking for permission to construct a railway line with funds collected locally. Permission was duly granted.

A line with a sixty-centimetre gauge was built from Gejiu through Bisezhai in Mengzi County to Shiping and opened in 1936 — Yunnan's second railway. Then between 1957 and 1970, the line was relaid on a new course, from Caoba after Bisezhai to Shiping and then on to Baoxiu, and converted into a metre-gauge track while preserving a 34-kilometre-long section of the original sixty-centimetre track between Jijie and Gejiu.

We took the Mengzi-Baoxiu Railway as far as Jijie. This is not only the major junction on the line but also the terminus of the 'inch track' — as the sixty-centimetre-gauge line is called — to Gejiu. Here one can see the



unique sight of two trains travelling side by side, each on its own different gauge track.

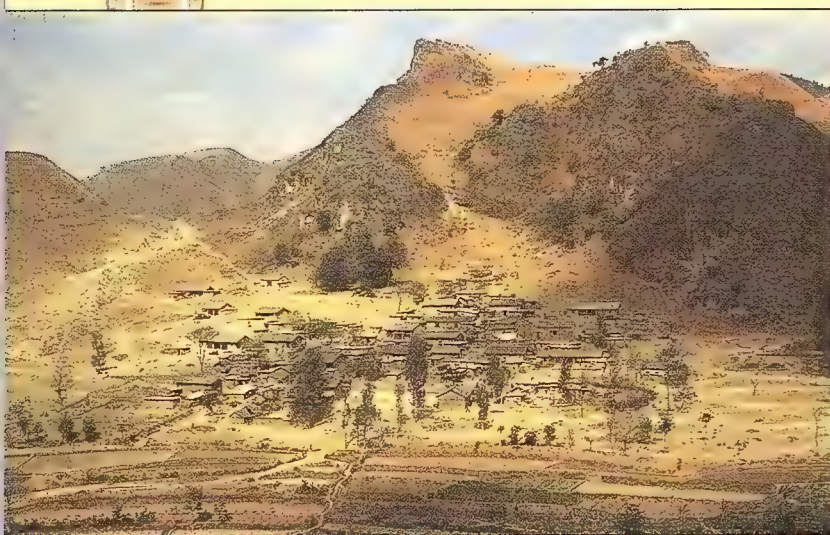
The steam engine pulling the smaller-gauge train bears the number 23; it was made in Philadelphia in the United States in 1927 and may be the oldest operational locomotive in the world. The carriages are tiny. The passengers sit facing one another on two rows of benches with their knees jammed together! The small train does, however, have advantages. Passengers need not queue to buy tickets; they just get on the train and pay on board.

There is only one railwayman on the train, who combines the activities of conductor, train attendant and ticket-seller. He is even the guard; when the train goes downhill, he climbs on top of the train to pull the brake to slow its descent.

Leaving this train at Jijie, I continued on the Mengzi-Baoxiu Railway. The town of Jianshui on the line housed an important garrison in ancient times. As we passed Jianshui, I spotted a long causeway known as the Seventeen Arch Bridge with a three-storeyed superstructure. Built during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), it spans the junction of the rivers Hujiang and Tazhong.

Shiping was the original terminus of the 'inch track'. After the conversion of the line to metre gauge, it was extended to Baoxiu. Before we reached the end of the line, however, we chugged slowly alongside what seemed at first like some mirage from a different world — Lake Yilong. Fifteen kilometres long and three kilometres wide, the lake is a natural reservoir, providing water for both irrigation and fishery. It was a pleasant surprise to find these shimmering waters waiting to greet us after the jungle-clad mountains through which we had been passing.

Translated by Gu Weizhou



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2

4



A house under construction near Shiping (3); scenery between Mengzi and Jianshui (1) (both by Xu Puyan). The Ming-dynasty Seventeen Arch Bridge at Jianshui (5) and the burnished pots made in that town (4) (4 and 5 by Cui Mengqiao). The train has to cross 273 bridges altogether (2, by Wu Jialin).



CHINA-WIDE
SPECIAL

Around Taihu by Bike



PHOTOS & ARTICLE BY ER DONGQIANG

Hundreds of fishing junks, with their multicoloured sails decorate the shores of Lake Taihu. They patiently wait for autumn and the start of a new fishing season

Editor's note: In the summer of 1990, the author of this article made a twenty-day excursion clockwise around Taihu (Big Lake) from Shanghai. This fresh water lake lies in southern Jiangsu near its border with Zhejiang. Taihu, the fourth largest lake in China, has an area of 2,425 square kilometres and a perimeter of five hundred kilometres, but it is only two metres deep on average. The lake contains many large and small islands, and there are hilly peninsulas extending into it from all sides. The cities and towns around it are set fairly close together, and the terrain is flat, making it suitable for a comfortable bicycle tour. These are the former lands of Wu (585-473 B.C.) and Yue (510-306 B.C.), the two ancient states whose territory embraced present-day Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Anhui.

Heat to Melt Asphalt

It was July 21, 1990. The noonday sun being too glary and far too hot, my friend and I waited until five o'clock before setting off on our brand-new bikes. It was still 35°, and the asphalt surface was soft and greasy.

Leaving the urban zone of Shanghai, we peddled off as the sun sank in the sky. The temperature dropped as well, and there was a cool, pleasant breeze. As we rode, we surveyed the paddy-fields and blue waters stretching away on either side of the road. This is an incredibly fertile area, with three harvests a year: two of rice and one of winter wheat. By evening we had ridden seventy kilometres and arrived at Luxu, a town at the apex of the territories of Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang.

Next morning we met the town magistrate, an avid coin-collector, who has amassed over 20,000 coins — gold, silver, bronze, iron and nickel — in addition to some paper notes. His collection is the result of seventeen years' collecting. For the most part the

Outside a teahouse in Zhenze town at dawn





*Clockwise from upper right:
Passing the pagoda
of Ciyun Monastery in
Zhenze*

*Playing mahjong is a
popular pastime with the
people of Luxu*

*The magistrate of Luxu,
an avid coin collector,*

*This stone resembles an
ancient shoe-shaped gold
ingot*



coins, except for some handed down in his family, had been acquired from blacksmiths, fishermen, crab-catchers, junk dealers and even garbage collectors.

After lunch we strolled in the streets and alleyways of this ancient town. We came upon a Qing-dynasty (1644-1911) building. At the bottom of one of its walls we saw a stone, rather like the ancient shoe-shaped gold ingots said to bring good luck to the inhabitants.

After dinner, we left Luxu and rode west to Zhenze via Lili. When we arrived at Zhenze, it was already 9:30 p.m.

Nanxun's Library

The townspeople of Zhenzhe are accustomed to drink tea very early in the morning. I got up at six and went out to join them in an old teahouse which was already packed with people, with many more sitting at tables set up outside. Latecomers (as we discovered we were!) have no chance of getting a seat. We had to wait quite a while before we could take our places on a bench,



Clockwise from upper right:
An iron statue of Avalokitesvara in Huzhou's Tiefsu Monastery
A huge purple clay 'Dongpo' pot with its characteristic loop handle
Nanxun's Jiayetang Library, once the home of more than half a million books
Making the famous Huzhou writing brushes



sharing a table with some other latecomers. Apparently, some of the townspeople and the farmers from the surrounding areas come in as early as four o'clock, their lives following the traditional pattern of 'early to bed and early to rise'. They pay twenty-five fen for tea leaves, then stay chatting and sipping tea until they are ready to leave, keeping the waiter busy going round with refills of boiling water. The teahouse also offered *mahua* (twisted dough fritters), sesame cakes and steamed buns stuffed with vegetables.

As we had breakfast, we conversed with the customer sitting next to us. We learned that there is a pagoda nearby at the Ciyun (Benevolent Cloud) Monastery, which dates from the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Although the pagoda turned out to be rather dilapidated, it stands in a charming river setting on which swim flocks of ducks. An ancient stone arched bridge spans the river. Men, carrying vegetables and live ducks and chickens in baskets, were going up and down, talking and joking and enjoying the morning air.

We left Zhenze at noon and arrived one and a half hours later at Nanxun, just over the provincial border in Zhejiang. We visited the Jiayetang Library on the banks of the Zhegu Brook. Liu Chenggan, now the curator and formerly the owner, comes from a

family of bibliophiles. He augmented his library during the social upheavals before and after the 1911 Revolution, purchasing a large number of old books from various collectors. He spent 300,000 silvers dollars in twenty years, coming at last to own some 600,000 volumes. However, the fortunes of his family declined, and many books were disposed of over the years. In 1951, Mr Liu donated his much depleted library to the state; by that time only 110,000 volumes were left.

The Double Pagoda at Huzhou

We left Nanxun in the afternoon and, pedalling fast, reached Huzhou three hours later. Huzhou, which lies due south of Lake Taihu at the confluence of the rivers Xitiao and Dangtiao, is a much larger place than Nanxun.

The next morning, we visited the Tiefo (Iron Buddha) Monastery where there is a statue of Avalokitesvara or Guanyin standing on the back of a huge turtle. The 2.15 metre statue weighs 1.5 tons. It is made of iron and was cast in 1025 during the Northern Song dynasty to replace an existing clay image. The icon was commissioned by Buddhist devotees to commemorate the Tang-dynasty monk Jian Zhen (688-763), famous for his repeated attempts to go to Japan to spread Buddhist doctrines; he succeeded in reaching Japan only on his sixth attempt at the age of sixty-six when he was already blind. Known in Japan as Ganjin, Jian Zhen founded the Ritsugaka Sect at Nara.

The serene faced statues sits beautifully posed, its robes exhibiting flowing lines. It has stood the test of almost a thousand years and is a treasured masterpiece of Buddhist art.

We next cycled on to Huzhou's Feiying Pagoda. This is a rare piece of architecture, at least in China, as it consists of a double pagoda, one enshrined within another. Visitors are normally permitted to enter only the outer one. From the reference materials in the exhibition hall we learned that the white inner pagoda was begun in 884 during the Tang dynasty but was completed only in the

The Feiying Double Pagoda at Huzhou



early Northern Song almost a century later. However, it was all too soon discovered that the materials used to build the pagoda were easily eroded. In addition, according to the monks there, the *sarira* — the sacred ashes of the eminent Buddhist monk buried there — shone so that a halo formed at the top of the pagoda. Devotees donated a large sum of money and built an outer pagoda 150 metres high as a protective casing for the inner one. However, this outer pagoda was struck by lightning in 1150 and burned down. Four years later, a new one was built in another type of stone. It was only fifty-five metres high but the original architectural style was retained.

After repeated requests, we were finally given special permission to enter the inner pagoda. It was filled with light seeping in from the outer pagoda, which created a truly mystical atmosphere.

Next morning after breakfast we made a side trip to the nearby village of Shanlian where we witnessed the procedure for making the famous Huzhou brushes. There are altogether twelve processes, including selection of materials, soaking, bunching the bristles, casting, decorating with inlaid ox-horn, and inscription. The name of this village is recorded in an ancient book; the *Hongzhi Huzhou Fuzhi* or *History of Huzhou Prefecture in the Hongzhi Reign* (the Hongzhi Reign occurred from 1488-1505 in the Ming dynasty). According to the entry, even then Huzhou produced writing brushes which were sold all over China. Shanlian itself faces Mount Hanshan which has a seven-storeyed pagoda shaped like a brush on its tip. Perhaps it was the villagers' view of Mount Hanshan's peak that inspired them to make Shanlian's brushes famous all over China.

Purple Clay Ware

At sunset we set off again. Cycling west in a light breeze, we reached the county seat of Changxing two hours later. Like the more famous Yixing in Jiangsu, Changxing is a producer of ceramics. The two counties face each other across their provincial bor-

Gathering water shield by wooden tub at Dongshan





Clockwise from upper right:
**A limestone rock at
 Changxing's Meishan**
**Small boats moored along the
 lake shore**
**A fruit pattern adorns the
 painted robe of an arhat in
 the Zijin Nunnery at
 Dongshan**
**The towerkeeper inside the
 ancient bell tower of
 Changxing**



der. The clay used by both counties comes from the same mountain range and, indeed, or so I was told, from the same quarry. The major difference is that Changxing has been producing ceramics for only thirty years, whereas Yixing's fame dates back to the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220). In the factory at Changxing we saw pots of every conceivable shape and size. The most attractive in my eyes was a huge 'Dongpo' loop-handled pot, so big that a child would have to stand on tiptoe to reach the handle. However, it was also available in a version so tiny that it can sit on the palm of the hand.

The afternoon saw us heading northwest in a cool and pleasant drizzle, to Meishan, where we visited the Changxing Rock, a limestone mass said to be 230 million years old. The exposed limestone rock is 300 metres from east to west and is made up of innumerable thin strata which rise like a thousand layer cake. A prehistoric seabed, Changxing Rock contains many fossils of snails, fish and coral.



*Clockwise from upper right:
Some of the hundreds of fishing junks lining the shores of Lake Taihu
Stone carvings of a happy child and two bats, both auspicious symbols, decorate the eaves of Mingshan Hall at Dongshan
Carvings on the entrance of a private mansion in Shangwan Village at Dongshan
The path skirting the orchards at Dongshan is lined with decorative carvings*



On the morning of July 27, I was awakened by the sound of a bell ringing. Yet, when I looked out of my hotel window, I could see only residential buildings and not a temple in sight. We set out on our bikes to locate the source of the sound and eventually came to an ancient bell tower. Only the top floor, which houses the ancient bell, was open to sightseers. The bottom part of the tower, despite its age, is still used for housing.

Across the border in Jiangsu, in Yixing County, we found the small town of Dingshu, which is China's largest producer of purple clay ware. Since these pots are much favoured by buyers, this small town is now a very prosperous place, with more than two-thirds of its inhabitants involved in ceramic production.

In the evening we arrived at Fenshui through a byway from Yixing. With nothing else to do, we sat in front of the hotel with a cup of strong tea, enjoying the cool breeze and talking with local people. The conversation veered to Lake Taihu itself — a fascinating topic. Towards the end of the 1960s, dykes were built to reclaim land from the lake. In the course of digging, a stone-paved street, wall base and well were uncovered. We were told that if you take a boat out on the lake on a clear and calm day, you can see ancient streets submerged below the surface of the water.

Dongshan and Its Arhats

At seven o'clock on the morning of July 29 we started off again, now on the northern side of the lake. We were frequently within sight of the lake itself and could admire the many small boats moored along its shore. Passing through Mudu, we arrived at Dongshan on the eastern side of the lake at eight o'clock in the evening. We had almost completed our circuit of the lake.

The following morning we set off early, intending to go right around the large Dongshan Peninsula. From the top of a small rise we looked out over the majestic scenery, the orchards and waters all the more attractive in the morning sun. As I stood there, I spotted something unusual — a number of large wooden tubs floating in the lake. Each of them held a person who seemed to be splashing about. However, these people were not learning to swim — my first thought! — but gathering water shield (*Brasenia schreberi*), a sort of waterweed which is used as pig feed.

Dongshan's major claim to fame is the Zijin (Purple Gold) Nunnery with its sixteen painted clay arhats, statues of Buddhist worthies. Each about one metre high, the arhats are remarkable for their diversity of expression and character portrayal. They were created eight hundred years ago in the Southern Song dynasty. The painted robes give the impression of being made of silk or brocade, which would certainly not be amazing as Taihu is one of China's greatest silk-producing areas. What is unusual is the type of motif applied to the robes. Dongshan is a fruit-growing area and the inspired artists decorated the arhats' robes with a medley of fruits: loquats, bayberries, peaches and other local fruits.

Still on the peninsula, peddling towards the village of Shangwan near Yangwan, we came across some fine examples of local architecture. Over the main entrance to one large dwelling we read the inscription: 'The brush and the golden ingot are of heavenly value'. The walls of this building are decorated with a bas-relief depicting a writing brush and a shoe-shaped gold ingot. The eaves

A network of fish ponds near the lake



bear a *da afu* (a painted clay figurine with a happy face, unique to the Wuxi area) flanked by two bats, symbol of good fortune. At either end there is a finely sculpted carp, also a symbol for prosperity and good fortune. Dating from the Ming dynasty, this building is called Shantang (Benevolence Hall). The family that built this house was obviously well educated and prosperous.

Taihu's Fishing Fleet

July 31 brought us to Taihuxiang in Wuxian County, the county seat of which is lovely Suzhou. This is the biggest fishing village on the lake. We saw hundreds of fishing boats drawn up beside the lake, fishing being banned at this time of year. Most of the older fisherfolk still live on their boats, but the younger generation now prefer to live in houses on the shore.

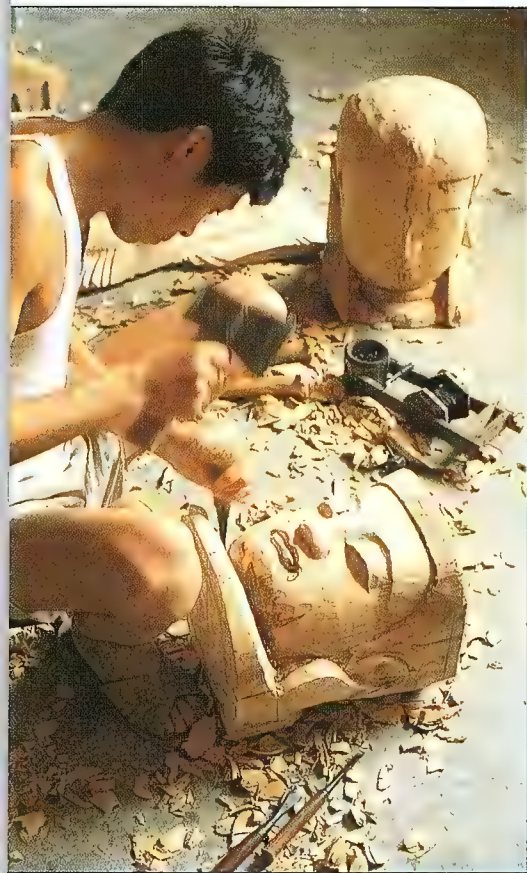
The fishing junks, many of them with more than two masts, make a magnificent sight even when moored. Some of the boats have a raised bow, said to be modelled on the war junks of General Yue Fei of the Song dynasty who fought against the Jin invaders. The general's boats were designed with such high bows to protect the crew from the barrage of arrows. Other fishing junks, however, are said to be built according to the design of the vessels of the Northern Navy set up in 1888 in Qing times.

We cycled slowly along the bank, taking it easy. Whenever we stopped, we were treated to tea and watermelon. The hospitable fishermen told us that they could not go out on the lake and start fishing again until the autumn. In the meantime, there was plenty to do making repairs to boats and nets and preparing the necessary candles, incense and paper money for the sacrificial ceremony held before the start of fishing season.

The hamlet of Chongshan, tucked away in a valley in Taihuxiang, is home to only thirty households, twenty of which earn their living as wood carvers. The remainder are engaged in lacquer painting and gold foil work. The spacious houses serve their owners

Offerings for the ceremonies marking the opening of fishing season





*Clockwise from upper right:
Building a fishing junk
A child wearing the
silver anklets common to
the children of Taihu
Village in Wuxian County
Like this artisan, most
people of Chongshan
hamlet earn their living
as woodcarvers.*



as both workshop and residence. How had the village come to specialize to this extent? The land in the area is and has been unfit for agriculture. Consequently, the local inhabitants were forced to think up some other way of earning a living. More than fifty years ago, one local man made his way to Shanghai where he learnt the art of carving. When he went home, he started to carve statues on religious themes for the many Buddhist monasteries of Jiangsu and Zhejiang. His talent being recognized as exceptional, he not only got many clients, he began to pass on his knowledge to fellow-villagers, thus becoming the founding master of a village of woodcarvers.

Tiny Chongshan was the last stop on our circuit of Lake Taihu. It was August 1 as we turned our backs on the lake for the final stretch home.



Translated by He Fei



CHINA-WIDE
SPECIAL

New Year at Labrang

The Labrang Lamasery, located in Xiahe County in the Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in southern Gansu, is one of the six major religious centres of the Gelugpa or Yellow Sect of Tibetan Buddhism. It was built in 1709. Labrang is a Tibetan word meaning 'Where the Buddhist Palace Stands'. Covering an area of 86,600 square metres, the lamasery has more than ninety buildings within its precincts.

Every year, from the first day of the first lunar month, the Monlam or Great Prayer Festival is held here. This is a big celebration for both monks and lay people, drawing pilgrims and devotees from all around, not just from Gansu but from Inner Mongolia, Qinghai and Sichuan. This festival, first started by the founder of the Gelugpa Sect — Tsong Khapa (1357-1419) — celebrates the victory of Buddha over his opponents. In Lhasa in the old days it used to last about three weeks.

Xiahe lies 240 kilometres southwest of Lanzhou, the provincial capital. It takes about nine hours to cover this distance by bus. I arrived on the eve of Lunar New Year and found lodgings in the Xiahe Hostel close to the lamasery.

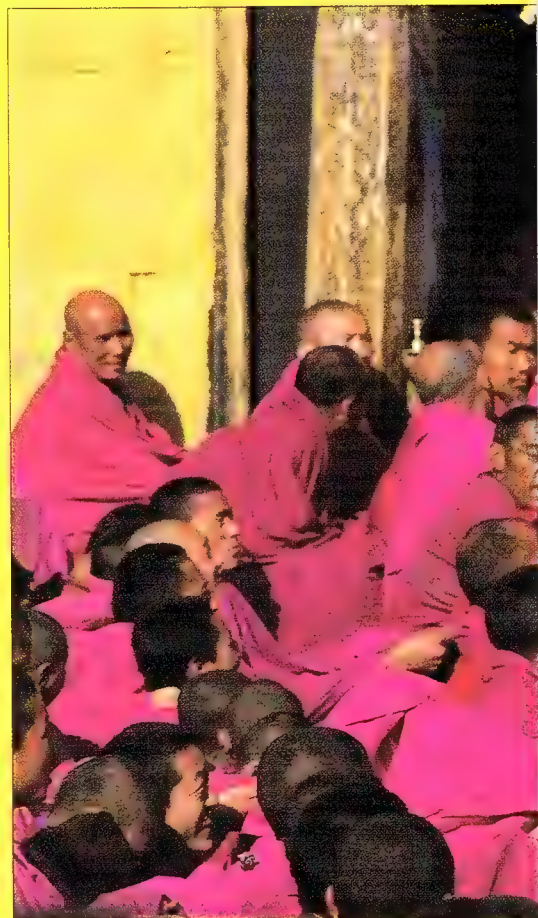
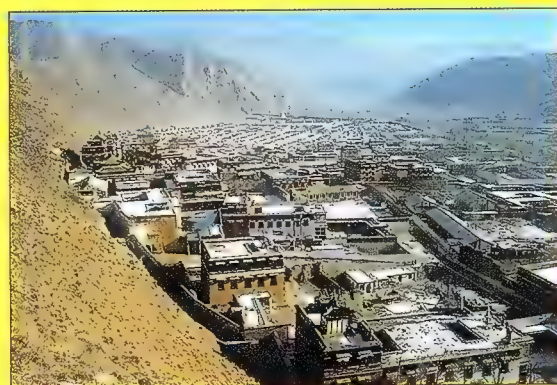
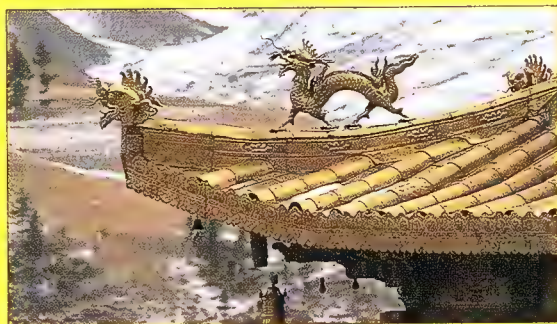
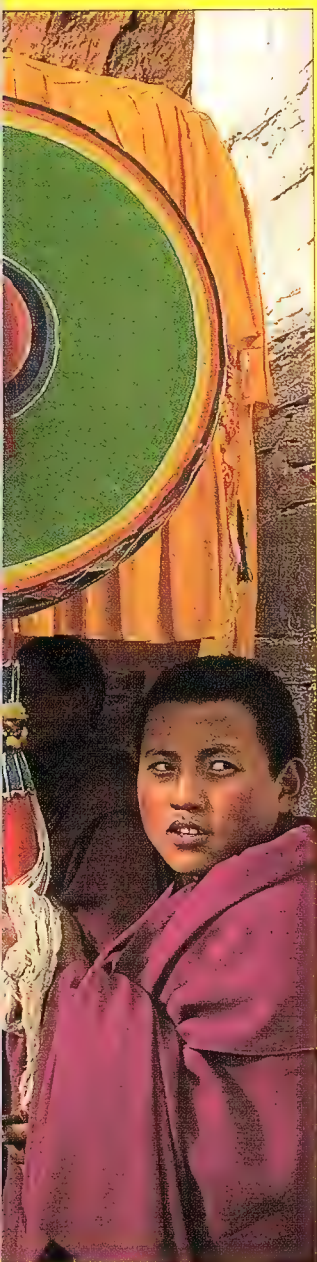
First Sunrises of the New Year

On New Year's Eve, pilgrims make a circuit of the lamasery, some turning prayer-wheels as they walk, others holding their joined palms high then prostrating full-length after every step.

Before dawn on New Year's Day, they gather on the open ground by the River Daxia in front of the lamasery. When the sun casts its first beams on to the golden roofs of the monastery, a commotion begins among the spectators. They gather up their long robes and kowtow deeply. Then they move to the river-

The restrained religious atmosphere (1) is enlivened considerably at festival times; here young monks participate in the Monlam Festival as drum bearers (2).





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bank, scoop up water in their hands and splash their heads with it before exchanging greetings.

Later, as I entered the Grand Scripture Hall, the main centre of religious activities, I saw a number of monks sitting on the floor on rectangular cushions, chanting the scriptures and each holding a bowl. They were waiting for their morning tea to be brought round. I heard that each monk is entitled to four bowls of butter tea. This is their breakfast, together with a lump of *zanba* (roast barley flour, a Tibetan staple) which they add themselves.

The following day was the monks' own festival. They all sat down on the open ground in front of the monastery to hold their 'sweets-distributing' ceremony. As a celebration among the lower ranks of monks, the atmosphere was very animated and informal. After a short prayer, sweets were carried out in large brass plates from the monastery and tossed to the crowds of monks who spread out the hems of their habits to catch what they could. The monks shouted incomprehensible things, to general merriment. One monk beside me suddenly took a sweet and stuffed it into my mouth. The taste was at once sweet and sour.

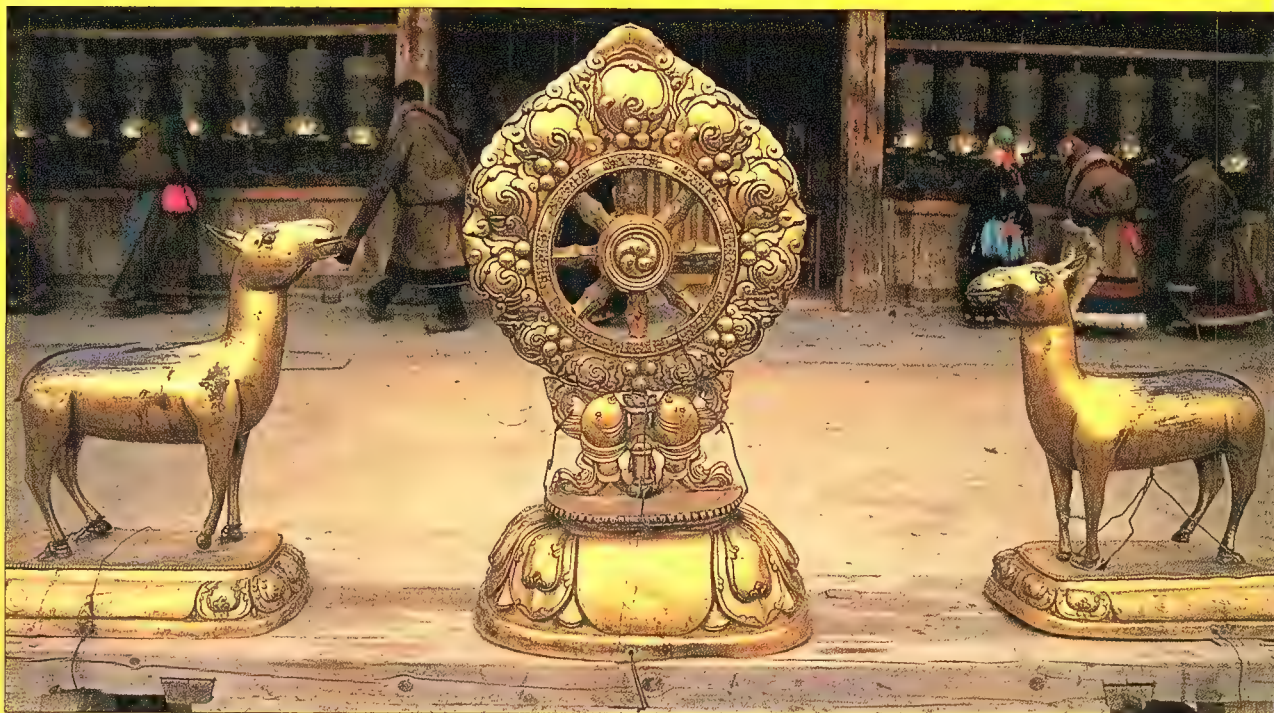
Harmony of Architecture

From the third to the fifth day of the first lunar month, there were no special activities. During this lull in the proceedings, the monks relaxed, visiting one another, drinking tea and eating sweets around the stove. Some of them no doubt were also preparing for their part when the Monlam Festival proper got underway.

I took the chance to explore the lamasery complex more thoroughly. The individual buildings are not, generally speaking, large but what struck me was their architectural harmony despite their sheer number and the fact that they date from widely differing times. Local building materials — stone, wood, earth — have been used. The walls are all faced with dark grey quartzite, giving them a neat appearance, and grit is wedged between the stone slabs to reinforce them.

The colours of the residential buildings interested me greatly. They are painted red, yellow or white according to their function and the status of those who live there. Red and yellow are reserved for Living Buddhas, white for the ordinary monkhood. The buildings are all in

The vast lamasery (2) boasts many bronze artworks: dragons on the roof ridge (1), mythical beasts to avert evil (4), and deer flanking the Wheel of Dharma (5). The sweets-distributing ceremony among the monks is a lighthearted affair (3).



traditional Tibetan style, wide at the bottom and tapering inwards towards the top. But I did notice that some had a roof in the Han Chinese 'palace' style, covered with gilt bronze and green glazed tiles. The combination of styles is surprisingly harmonious and is also found in Lhasa.

The halls are decorated with many examples of gilt bronze ornamentation as well as Sanskrit inscriptions and the signs for the sun and moon, which have special religious significance. Among the best artworks are the reclining deer and the Wheel of Dharma (the latter representing the unity of all things and symbolizing Sakyamuni himself), streamers, lions and so on, mainly set on the roof. Also interesting is the mythical creature with a lion's head but large female breasts, and rather reminiscent of a ship's figurehead. This creature is set at the four corners of a building to avert evil.

On the fifth day of the first lunar month we paid a visit to a nearby Tibetan village. As soon as we entered the village we caught sight of a new house in Tibetan style. As we were approaching this house, a huge dog rushed out, barking wildly. I was scared stiff and froze to the spot. Luckily, someone inside yelled at it, bringing it under control. I looked up and saw a pretty Tibetan girl sitting at the window, giggling as she watched my discomfiture. Her marten hat, padded brocade robe, and fine coral and amber necklace marked her out as of a wealthy family.

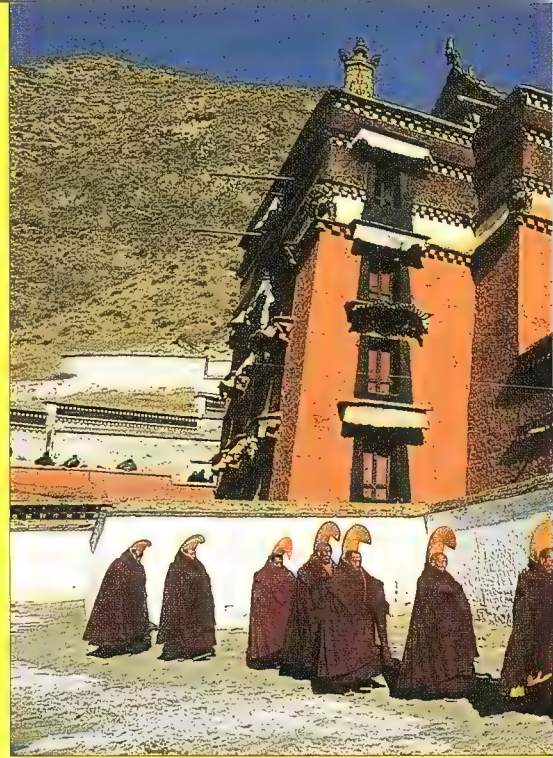
The Monlam Festival

The festivities picked up from the sixth day onwards. Every morning there were scripture-chanting sessions and teachings by one of the lamasery's renowned *tulkus* or Living Buddhas.

The abbot is himself a Living Buddha, so his every step involved a considerable amount of pomp and circumstance. Apart from musicians playing drums and horns, he had a train of monks wearing the ceremonial yellow 'cockscomb' hats of their sect to escort him to and from his residence. Each morning young monks drew complicated designs in white lime and red brickdust on the ground at the entrance to his residence, the main themes being auspicious clouds and flying dragons.

From the sixth to the twelfth day, devotees gathered in front of the Scripture Hall at the lamasery every afternoon to listen to the sermons being given inside. At the end of the service, monks came out with pails of water which had been blessed and to which butter had been added. The worshippers rushed over to participate in this special ceremony of benediction as the monks ladled out the holy water and splashed it over the waiting heads. Some pilgrims even produced glasses, jars and plastic bags to catch drops of the water which they would then carefully carry back for family and friends so that they too could receive its benediction.

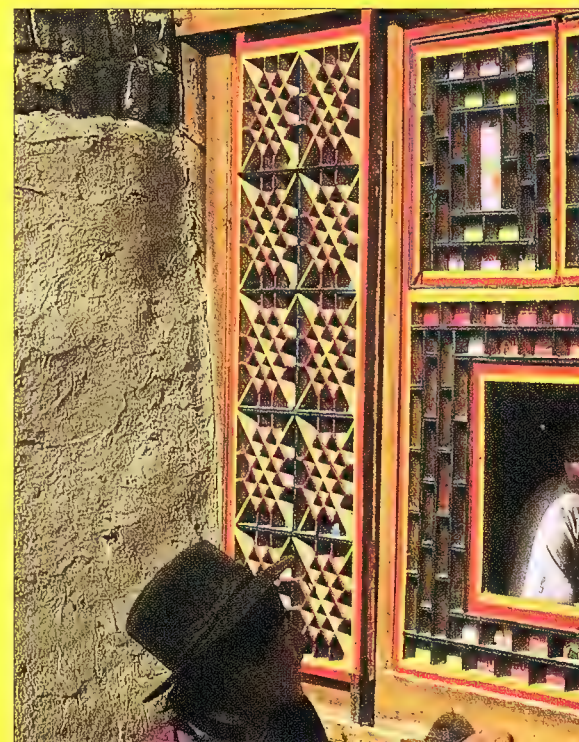
Tibetans are fond of animals, and kind to all living things. They believe that dogs are rein-



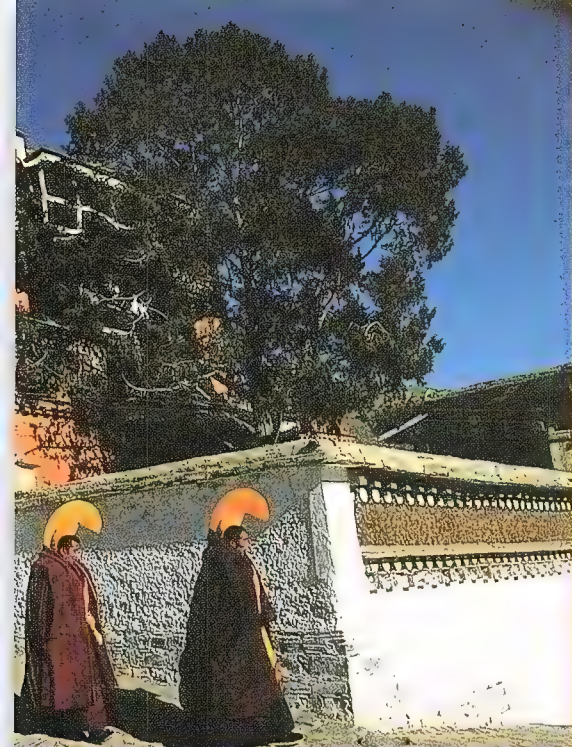
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carnations of monks who failed to achieve the right standard and have thus returned to their old haunts as punishment. Apart from keeping dogs at home, Tibetans also feed the many strays in the street. The area near the monastery is consequently always patrolled by a large pack of sturdy stray dogs. The ratio of dogs to humans in Xiahe must be about one to one! Usually, these dogs are harmless. But if a dog comes charging up looking aggressive, be very careful, since there is always an exception to the rule.

Prayers to 'Leave the Bitter Sea'

From the ninth day onwards, a prayer ceremony took place at the preaching platform, mainly attended by poor and humble people, as well-off Tibetans do not feel the need to take part in this ceremony. These are prayers to 'leave the bitter sea'.

I went to take a look. It was not so crowded around the platform. Participants sat cross-legged on the ground, eyes closed, expression devout, most turning a prayer-wheel in one hand. A monk led the prayer ceremony by chanting a line from the scriptures in a low, resonant voice, after which the devotees would repeat it. It was a cry from their hearts, showing their courage and tenacity in face of the troubles of their hard lives.

On the morning of the twelfth day, a Living Buddha was scheduled to preach on an important part of doctrine. Since this was a very grand occasion, the dais was decorated especially. Colourful streamers embroidered with elaborate designs fluttered nearby. There was a noticeable increase in the number of monks and lamas present at the preaching session, not only from this lamasery but from Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and lamaseries elsewhere.

After the solemn gathering, it was quite a sight to see these monks, especially the younger ones, careering about, wrestling in twos and threes, others engaging in a boisterous game of football.

Just as I was setting up to take a picture, two young monks poked their noses into my wide-angle lens. They wanted to take a closer look at it. We struck up a conversation; they understood Mandarin, and also spoke some English. They were friendly and easy-going and seemed to be quite well-informed about cameras, tape recorders, and so on. I was told that the monks here at Xiahe tend to be liberal and open-minded.

The lamasery is not just a centre of Tibetan Buddhism. It is also a school, an institution of higher education. So apart from meditation, the monks also study philosophy, medicine, astronomy, geography, Sanskrit and other



The escort on its way to collect the abbot for a teaching session (1, by Chen Weizhong). Lamasery doors guarded by a fearsome protector of the faith (2). Intricate painted latticework on a village house (3).



1



2



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languages, poetry, calligraphy, painting, and more. It takes fifteen to twenty years to complete the courses of the 'Five Theories' of the non-Esoteric canons alone. The main methods of study are learning by rote and debate. Only after the completion of these studies can they start to delve into the teachings of the Esoteric Sect.

Sunning the Buddha

The climax of the Monlam Festival came on the thirteenth day. On that day a huge Buddha *thangka* (a painted or embroidered cloth scroll) is exposed to the faithful on the slope on the opposite bank of the River Daxia. When I got to the place, the bank and nearby slopes were already crowded with spectators and worshippers. It was ten o'clock in the morning.

As drums and horns resounded, a guard of honour of young monks filed out of the Lesser Golden-Tiled Hall, some carrying long horns, some holding large canopies, others equipped



with a drum and drumstick. They were followed by a pair of huge 'tigers' with coats of yellow and red stripes, accompanied by many monks. It is said that these 'beasts' are able to chase away evil and 'blaze a new trail' ... presumably for the faith.

At the end of the procession came the monks carrying the *thangka*. As they passed, pilgrims swarmed around them, hoping to touch it, an honour and a blessing. Hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder, the monks with the huge, heavy scroll piled on their shoulders struggled to break through the frenzied crowds. Finally they reached the top of the slope and unfurled the 'scroll,' still veiled by a protective yellow cloth. Its true size was now revealed — over thirty metres by twenty metres.

A beautifully dressed girl in the village (1, by Chen Weizhong). Special patterns on the ground outside the residence of a Living Buddha (2), and pilgrims assiduously turn prayer-wheels to acquire merit (3). Devotees rush over to catch drops of the water which has been blessed (4). Dogs outnumber worshippers at times (5).



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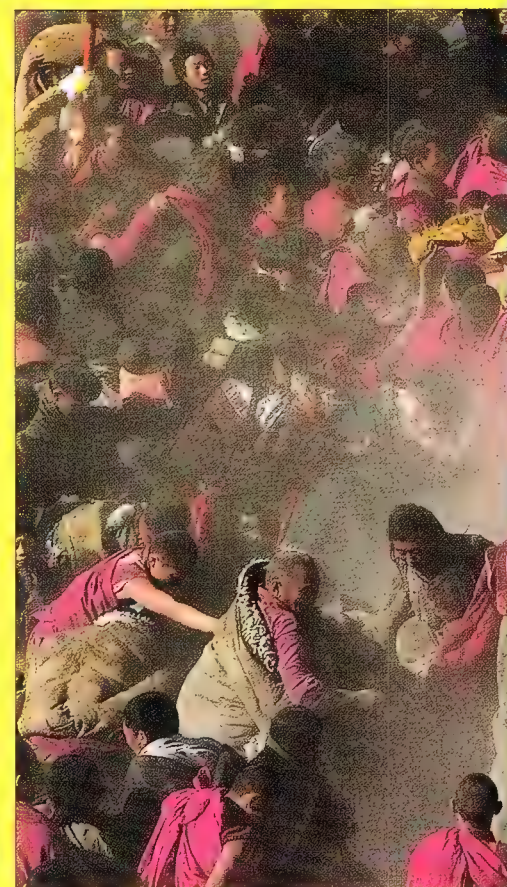
Drums echoed up and down the river valley as a Living Buddha emerged from the lamasery to preside over the ritual. He first kowtowed to the giant Buddha image then presented a *hata* (white ceremonial scarf). The yellow cover was slowly drawn off but I noticed that, instead of watching the Buddha as it emerged, the people there all knelt on the ground and kowtowed repeatedly in deepest reverence.

When the image was finally revealed, the Living Buddha began to chant before holding up a vessel of holy water and splashing the congregation with it. Even monks and lamas vied with one another to catch a few drops. After that, it was time for him to mount a throne and watch as young monks performed a religious dance.

Rainbow of Colours

On this occasion of the Sunning of the Buddha, the Tibetan women who are among the pilgrims and visitors take pride in dressing up in their best, especially the younger ones. Since Xiahe plays host to Tibetans from many different localities at this time, the range of costumes displayed is quite breathtaking.

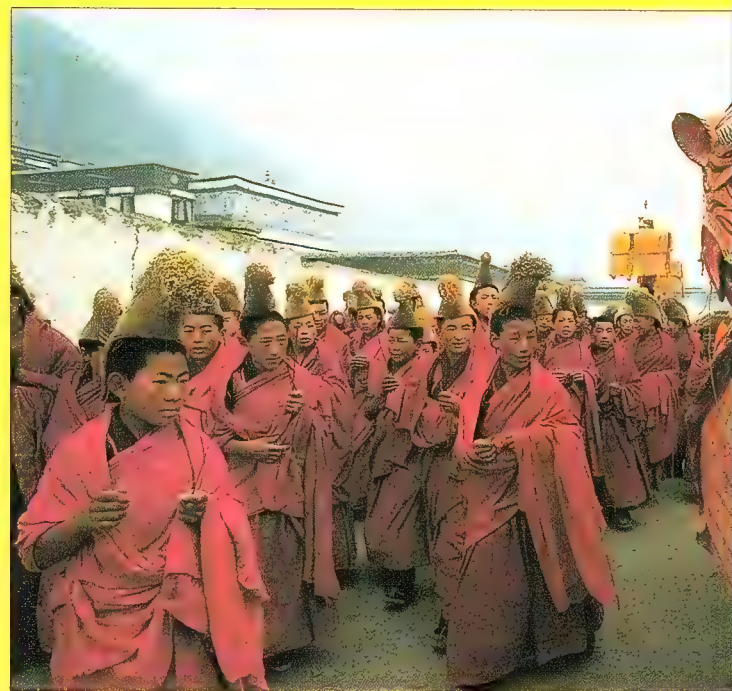
There are women with exquisite fur hats, their 108 pigtails (a sacred number) decorated with strings of *labai* (rosin fossil), coral, silver-inlaid ornaments, etc. At the end of the pigtails are attached large ornamental plaques. These ornaments indicate their wealth and social status. The jewellery is also superb; for no-



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monds, in particular, jewellery is considered their portable wealth.

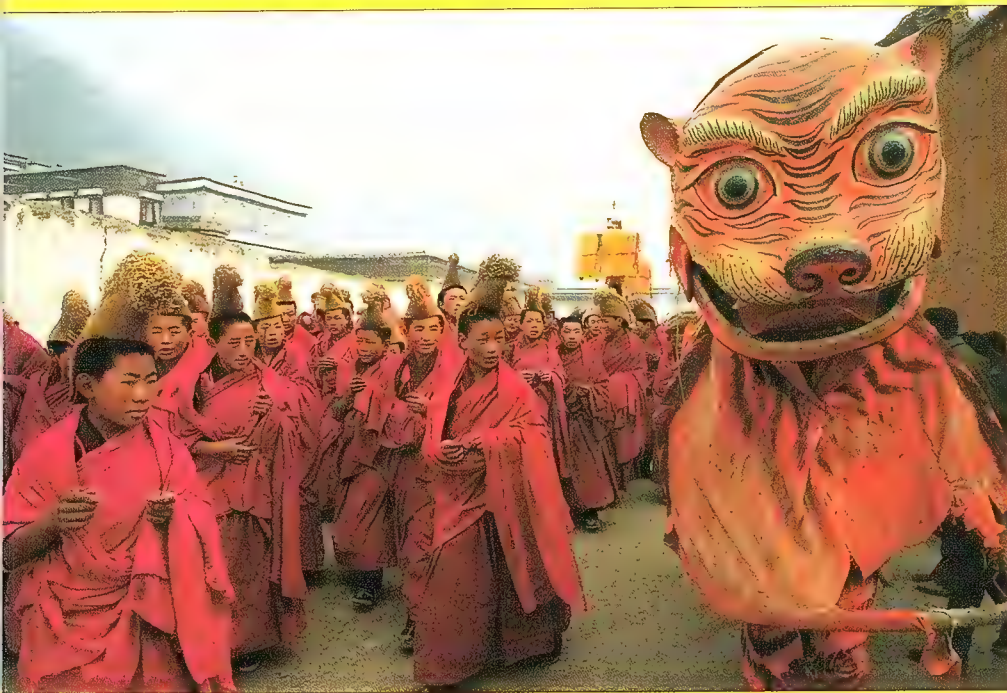
In southern and eastern Gansu alone, almost every valley has its own dress variant. The women from Boyu, a village in Zhuguo County further south in the Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, stand out because of their elegant satin pantaloons worn with a tiny decorative apron, a long robe and a wide woven belt, as well as the astonishing bejewelled 'breast plate' many of them wear on ceremonial occasions.

Despite the dance performance at the Sunning of the Buddha, the real day for dancing is the fourteenth day of the first lunar month. This is the time when the monks who have been

Despite their camera-shyness, the monks are seasoned in debate (1). It's a free-for-all as people press forward to touch the giant thangka (2), but the wait for the scroll to be unfurled is nothing to these fervent devotees (3).

practising barefoot in the snow all winter show off their skills. According to the historical records, these religious dances — *qamo* dances — used to have the aim of expelling evil spirits, in other words, were a form of ritual exorcism. That afternoon, the square before the monastery's Grand Scripture Hall was packed as monks dressed in brocade robes and masks made of wood, metal or leather danced gracefully to the rhythm of some sort of percussion instrument.

Tibetans are fond of making intricate ornaments out of butter, a practice which is rooted deep in their history. The fifteenth day is the



2



date of the Butter Lantern Festival. Designs moulded from yak butter and coloured with natural pigments by expert hands are put on display in the square at the lamasery. The themes are mainly Tibetan folklore and religious tales, including stories from the life of Buddha. There are also figures of mythical characters, birds, animals and flowers as well as pretty little butter lamps set up on special racks. The monasteries seem to be the main centres of this intricate craft; the Ta'er Lamasery near Xining in eastern Qinghai is also renowned for its butter sculptures.

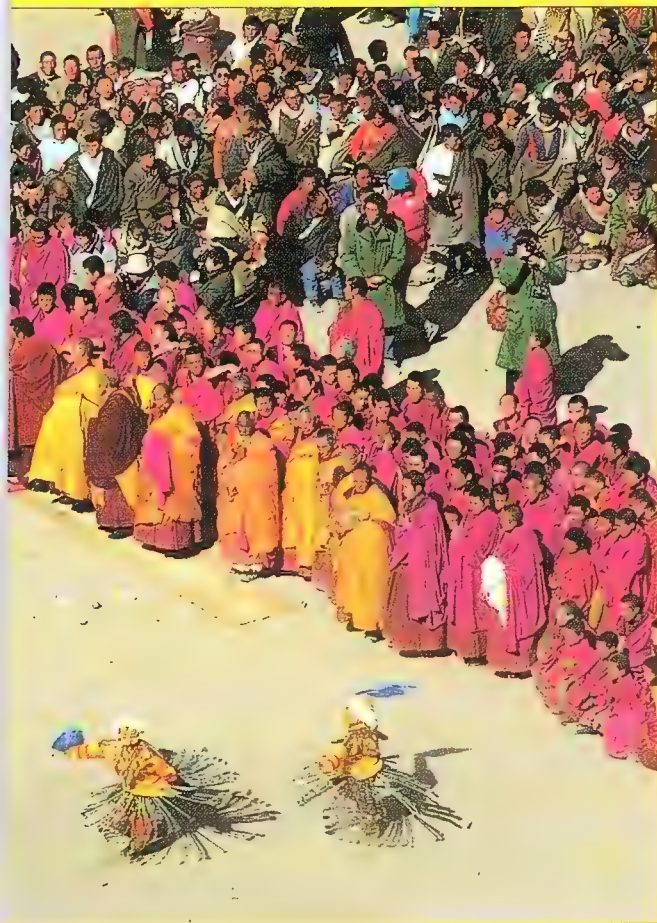
Translated by Wang Mingjie

The procession with the 'tiger' (1), and ritual dances before a Living Buddha (3). Ornate butter sculptures are mounted on wooden stands in the courtyard (2). Some visitors parade exquisite examples of Tibetan dress (4), including this woman from Zhugqu County (5) (1, 2 and 5 by Chen Weizhong).

3



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HONG KONG

GUANGZHOU

WUZHOU

YANGSHUO

GUILIN

HENGYANG

CHANGSHA

YUEYANG

WUHAN

LUOYANG

XI'AN

ZHENGZHOU

SHIJIAZHUANG

BEIJING



CHINA-WIDE

SPECIAL

The Hong Kong-Beijing Coach Tour

ARTICLE BY XIE YING



The coach that carried us safely all the way
(by Mera Travel)

The very first overland coach tour from Hong Kong to Beijing was inaugurated on May 1, 1990. Organized by China Adventures Ltd. (via the sole agent in Hong Kong, Mera Travel), it took participants across seven provinces in twenty-three days, stopping at sixteen cities and towns.

Although this way of travelling may seem superficial, it does offer the chance to see China and the Chinese from a rather different perspective than the usual group tour. However, roads are rough and travelling times long and, at HK\$15,600 per head, it is not an inexpensive option. The purpose-built luxury coach in which we travelled was airconditioned and well-equipped, with an on-board toilet, forty-one comfortable seats, drinks-dispensing machine and video screen.

A simple ritual was performed prior to our departure. Burning joss-sticks were placed on the body of the coach before the engine started — a wish for a safe and happy journey.

GUANGZHOU

Modern City, Rural Backdrop

Shenzhen in Guangdong Province was our first stop after crossing the border from Hong Kong. As we drove north through the counties of Bao'an and Dongguan, we were impressed by the eye-soothing greenery and the slow-flowing waters in this region of rivers and lakes that spreads across the alluvial plain of the Pearl River delta. Although this is a predominantly rural area, here and there we saw clusters of factories, high-rise hotels and apartments.

Guangzhou is a city where old and new intermingle. The narrow older streets packed with people contrast vividly with the modern buildings and spacious roads in the more recently developed parts of the city. This was one of the starting points of the 'Silk Road of the Sea' and

the city has remained a major trading port.

We stayed in the Dongfang Hotel. Covering a whole wall in the main lobby there is a wood carving covered in glittering gold. Such decorative wood carvings, usually found on doors and window frames, furniture and screens, are one of the famous crafts of Chaozhou, an ancient town in the far east of Guangdong Province.

Guangzhou's nightlife is varied and noisy. The ear-pounding disco music reminded us that we were still only at China's 'southern gateway', in an area open to the outside world for longer than any other.

Zhaoqing, west of Guangzhou, is famous for its amazing topography. The grotesque Qixingyan (Seven Star Crag) which seem to rise from the surrounding waters stand tall against the skyline. They are linked by chain bridges which sway to and fro alarmingly as you cross them.

On this, the second night of the trip, we visited the old town centre of Zhaoqing. As night fell, the town became a sea of lights, the soft residential glow contrasting with the garishly coloured neon advertising shops and places of amusement. Beside the road, in the dim yellow light of the street lamps, I saw — for the first time in my life — women cobblers at work repairing shoes.

WUZHOU

Snakes Alive!

On our way to Wuzhou (on the third day) we passed a vast stretch of paddy fields near Fengkai. Walking slowly by the roadside was a man herding a flock of ducklings while, in the field, some women were transplanting rice seedlings. We hur-



At a snake farm in Wuzhou
(by Wallace Tse)

ried to capture the scene with our cameras. Most of the forty passengers on the coach were city-dwellers, and were intrigued by this simple rural lifestyle.

We finally arrived at Wuzhou, just over the provincial border in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Threading its way through the narrow streets of the city, the coach — which was twelve metres long, 2.5 metres wide and 3.2 metres high — reminded me of nothing as much as a fairytale giant trying to squeeze through a narrow tunnel. Its sides grazed the eaves of the houses on either side of the street several times.

We stopped at a snake farm, big business in this part of the worked. The Wuzhou Snake Farm is the biggest in China and Southeast Asia, with hundreds of thousands of snakes. The supervisor who met us picked up a huge snake and squeezed open its jaws so that we could take a look at its fangs. But it did not try to bite and we figured it must be used to being handled. Although we did not know the names of the species, we saw some



Transplanting rice seedlings with a local farmer in Yangshuo (by Wallace Tse)

most beautiful snakes — including flat-headed cobras, snakes with black and yellow stripes and others covered with circular patterns. Snake's blood, snake's gall and snake wine are all considered fine tonics by the Chinese, and the flesh is used in soups, especially in winter.

We stayed the night in Wuzhou. At dawn the next day (the fourth day of our trip), we strolled along the river bank and chatted with the local people who were themselves enjoying a morning walk or practising *kungfu*, *taijiquan* or swordplay. They seemed delighted to have us join them in their exercises.

YANGSHUO

Karst Drama

We travelled west then north to reach one of China's most celebrated landscape zones. Rain was pouring from the sky as we approached Yangshuo, but it

HONG KONG

GUANGZHOU

WUZHOU

YANGSHUO

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HENGYANG

CHANGSHA

YUEYANG

WUHAN

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SHIJIAZHUANG

BEIJING



A banner announces our safe arrival in Xingping (by Lam Kwong Man)

did not seem to bother the local farmers. They continued to cycle along the road, fast but calmly, their bicycles loaded with baskets of goods. They were determined to get to market and doggedly forded the water streaming down the road, their spirits apparently undampened.

The magnificent karst scenery of Yangshuo certainly lived up to its reputation. Like silver ribbons against green velvet, rivers flowed across the vast, fertile fields stretching among mountains shaping the skyline. We were overwhelmed by this marvellous work of nature and envied the people who were able to make their homes in this 'paradise on earth'.

The coach stopped next to some paddy-fields where we soon discovered that walking along the earth embankments between the fields was no easier than balancing on a tightrope. You could easily end up with muddy feet! Some of my fellow-passengers joyfully took the opportunity to jump down into the mud and take a hand at transplanting rice seedlings alongside the farmers.

Racing into the setting sun, we came to our overnight stop. Tents were erected on a stretch of grass on the bank of the River Lijiang at Xingping. Even the most luxurious hotel fails to compare with the experience of sleeping in the open air in these scenic surroundings. Unfortunately, the experience was shortlived. It seemed that our application for permission to camp had been refused, at least on this pilot trip, and we had to pack up and move into the Yangshuo Hotel after all.

Later that evening, we went out on the river in rowing boats, only to find that we did not have the water to ourselves. Lights from fishing boats flickered all around us through the dark. We approached one of them and watched in the dim light as of a lamp tame cor-

morants dived repeatedly, bringing back their catch each time to their master on the boat.

GUILIN

Home of Liu Sanjie

Friends meeting us in Guilin on the sixth day regaled us with the story of Liu Sanjie. This legendary Zhuang figure, believed to have been a real person who lived near Liuzhou, was the third daughter of the Liu family. Known for her clever, witty repartee when singing in the local antiphonal style, she is said to have beaten three arrogant scholars in a test of skills.

In this fairytale setting of preposterous peaks which you could believe had been lifted from a Chinese painting, a landscape



The cormorants of Lijiang's river are famous for their fishing skills (by Wallace Tse)



Camping out in our colourful yellow tents at a scenic spot at Xingping (by Roxman Ip)

which has inspired countless artists and poets, our friends thought it would be fun, especially for the non-Chinese among us, to dress up. And indeed we had a lot of laughs in the strange mixture of costumes — old and new — they dug up for us.

Being able to see the famous scenic sights of China is certainly one of the main attractions of this coach tour, but sometimes it is the ordinary people you meet along the way who remain longest in your memory. As for me, I cannot forget the two children I saw sitting on a bench in the



*On Mt. Hengshan in Hunan just after sunrise, looking forward to an early breakfast
(by Roxman Ip)*

shade of a tree by a Guilin road diligently doing their homework, a study in concentration.

HENGYANG

Up a Sacred Mountain

We continued our journey north in the direction of Hengyang and, in a show of hospitality, were met by our hosts on the Hunan border.

In recent years, China has put major efforts into boosting tourism by building more hotels in cities and towns all over the country. The accommodation during our trip, for instance, was superb. All the hotels we stayed in were airconditioned and had private bathrooms. However, one very pleasant surprise came north of Hengyang on Mount Hengshan where we stayed in the Zhulou (Bamboo Mansion) Guesthouse. The simple, unadorned bamboo huts standing side by side in the secluded courtyard were all with bamboo furniture which made us feel extra close to nature.

On the seventh day of our trip, we started off very early to climb Mount Hengshan since we wanted to see the spectacular sunrise. Hengshan is known as one of the 'five famous mountains' of China. Often hidden in the mist, the 'Southern Gate of Heaven' is near a monastery on one of the mountain's seventy-two peaks, the highest rising to 1,290 metres above sea-level. Many of China's temples were built on such high mountains far from the bustle and confusion of the world, places where the spirit can expand and meditation comes naturally. Both Buddhists and Taoists followed this practice.

Back at ground level we discovered other wonders — including babies wearing colourful tiger hats and hats studded with good luck charms. We lost no time in capturing such scenes which shed light on everyday life and age-old traditions as we penetrated deeper into China.

CHANGSHA

Craftsmanship Old and New

Onwards we sped to the provincial capital, Changsha. Visitors cannot fail to be impressed by the exquisite relics excavated in 1972 from the Mawangdui tomb dating from the Western Han dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 24). However, the consummate skills of modern-day Changsha craftspeople are no less amazing.

Brocade is not only a superb demonstration of the dexterity of craftsmen, but also reflects the perception of beauty



Zhulou Guesthouse, where we stayed on our trip to Mt. Hengshan (by Mera Travel)

among the peoples of the Orient. We watched as weavers manipulated wooden pedal-operated looms using skills passed down to them through the centuries.

Another craft is the acclaimed Hunan reversible embroidery which shows the same pattern on both sides of the thin gauze on which it is executed. This intrigues many people, but the technique involved is relatively simple. The secret is to embroider on both sides at the same time, with one needle on each side piercing the same hole with the same colour thread. In recent years, Hunan's needlewomen have perfected double-sided embroideries with a different pattern on each side — now that really is tricky! It requires faultless design sense and utter precision of stitches.

YUEYANG

Lake Dongting

The streets of Yueyang in northern Hunan Province (where we stopped on the eighth day) are lined with residential buildings with whitewashed walls and soot-black tiled roofs — neat and elegant in appearance. The multiple roofs and upturned eaves of the Yueyang Tower, however, are covered in golden-yellow glazed tiles. It stands on the northeastern bank of Lake Dongting and displays the luxurious architectural style associated with the nobility.



Bumping into former Chief Secretary of Hong Kong Sir David Akers-Jones and his wife (fifth and third from the left, by Roxman Ip)

Climbing to the top of the tower to gain a bird's-eye view over the lake used to be a favourite pastime of scholars, poets and nobles. Today, anyone can mount the tower to admire its scenic surroundings and share the peace of mind experienced by all those who set foot here in the past.

Lake Dongting, with an area of 2,820 square kilometres, is China's second largest freshwater lake. It is famous for its eels, loaches and soft-shelled turtles as well as carp.

HONG KONG

GUANGZHOU

WUZHOU

YANGSHUO

GUILIN

HENGYANG

CHANGSHA

YUEYANG

WUHAN

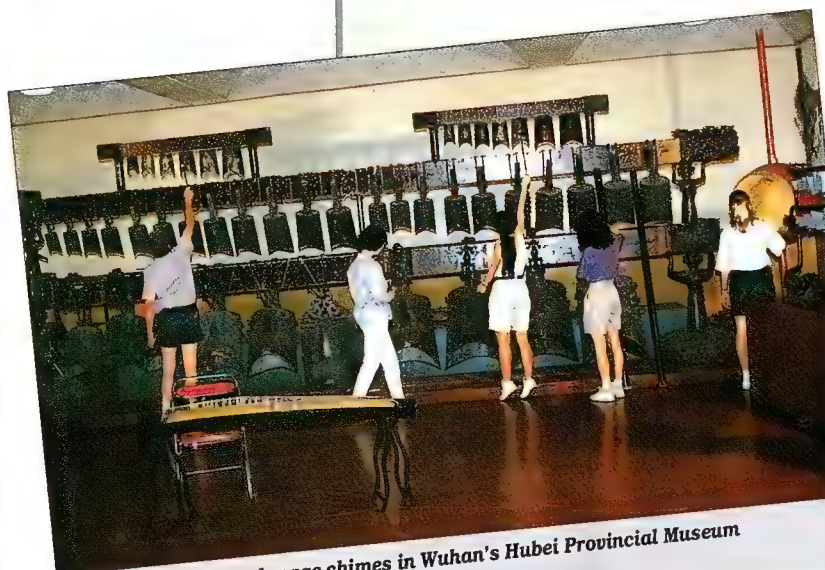
LUOYANG

XI'AN

ZHENGZHOU

SHIJIAZHUANG

BEIJING



Replicas of antique bronze chimes in Wuhan's Hubei Provincial Museum
(by Mera Travel)

WUHAN

City on the Yangtse

We moved on to Wuhan, a large and important city on the River Yangtse and capital of Hubei Province. We arrived at sunset on the ninth day of our trip. As we approached, the huge Wuchang Bridge across the Yangtse came into sight. At the eastern end stands the Huanghe (Yellow Crane) Tower, first built around 1,700 years ago; at the western end the modern 24-storey Qingchuan Hotel, our lodging for the night.

After a good sleep, we started out early the next morning to tour the city. Engulfed in the morning mist, the bridge was exceptionally striking. Wuhan is an agglomeration of three cities: Hankou, Hanyang and Wuchang. Before the 1,100-metre-long Yangtse bridge was built in 1957, ferries were the only link between Wuchang and Hanyang. A smaller bridge



The Stupa Forest of the Shaolin Monastery at Dengfeng in Henan (by Mera Travel)

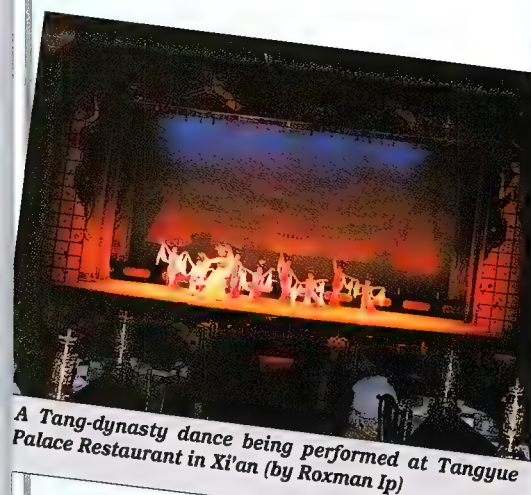


A Shaolin monk giving a Buddhist name to one of the members of our group (by Roxman Ip)

over the Hanjiang connects Hanyang and Hankou.

We crossed the Yangtse to the scenic Donghu (East Lake) district. The clear water rippled gently and the shoreline was marked by willows swaying in the soft breezes. The Hubei Provincial Museum by the lake was our target. There we saw replicas of the bronze chimes from the tomb of the Marquis of Zeng of the early Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.), excavated near Suizhou. Museum staff played them for us, the eerie tones transporting us back through the centuries.

Our time in Wuhan was packed with interest. At the Yellow Crane Tower we saw a tile mural of an old man riding on

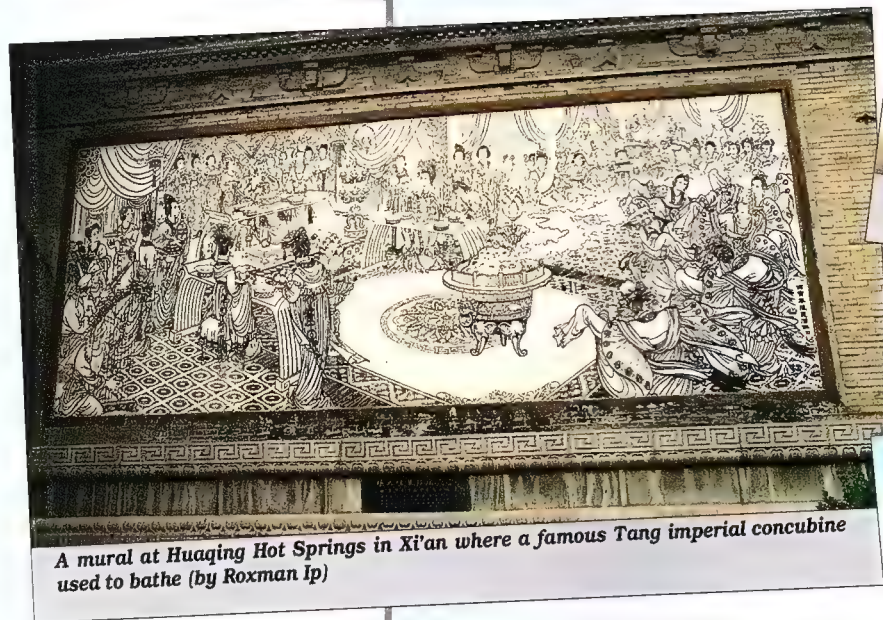


save time, instead of hanging up the string in the approved manner, we just laid it on the ground and lit it. The exploding firecracker twirled on the ground, giving off sparks and crackling wildly. All the boredom and monotony of the long day in the coach vanished completely....

One of the places which was on the top of our list to visit was the Shaolin Monastery on Mount Songshan in Dengfeng County, east of Luoyang. This was the training ground of Buddhist monks who evolved superior martial arts techniques to counteract the immobility of their long hours of meditation. Bodhidharma, founder of the Chan (Zen) Sect, came to Shaolin in 527 and is credited with this development.

After lunch on the twelfth day we took

capitals, Xi'an — capital of Shaanxi — was our stop on the fourteenth and fifteenth days. It boasts the most extraordinary historic sites: the Banpo Neolithic Village, the Mausoleum of Shihuang of the Qin dynasty (221-207 B.C.), the Huaqing Hot Springs, the Bell and Drum Towers, the Greater and Lesser Wild Goose Pagodas, the Forest of Steles in Shaanxi Provincial Museum.... Particularly impressive to me



the back of a fairy crane towards heaven — an interpretation of the legend which gives the tower its name. At the Guiyuan Temple we saw arhat statues painted gold, each displaying a vividly different personality and expression. At a jade factory we watched as a rough pebble was transformed into a work of art by people who used tools as though they were extensions of their hands.

When night fell, Wuhan was transformed by a grand lantern show. Some of the 'lanterns' — more like illuminated tableaux — had movable parts. I can still remember the look of amazement on spectators' faces when the 'elephant' shook its head and raised its trunk!

LUOYANG

Shaolin's Martial Arts

As the eleventh day dawned we headed due north towards Xinyang, over the border in Henan Province, en route to Luoyang. We arrived at the hotel in Xinyang at sunset and decided to let off some firecrackers in celebration. However, to

the time to stroll through the Stupa Forest, the burial place of over 230 leading monks, next to the monastery. In the evening we were invited to see a martial arts demonstration at the Shaolin Gymnasium. A group of young monks dressed in the regulation grey robes with yellow sashes performed for us. I and my companions were very excited about meeting these martial monks, especially in view of the Shaolin Monastery's reputation and growing fame overseas, boosted by a number of *kungfu* films.

We met more monks when we visited the Baima (White Horse) Temple in Luoyang on the thirteenth day of our trip. The twelve eminent monks there were dressed in yellow robes and, somewhat to our surprise, they willingly posed for our cameras. The temple is thought to have been China's first Buddhist temple; it dates from the year 68.

XI'AN

Ancient Capital

One of China's most important ancient



Chairman Mao Zedong Memorial Hall which stands in Beijing's Tian'anmen Square (by Mera Travel)

was the scale of the terracotta warriors and cavalry excavated from Shihuang's mausoleum. This is truly one of the wonders of the world.

One evening, we dined at the Tangyue Palace, where the dishes served and the dances performed are modelled on Tang-dynasty style, Xi'an having known particular glory as the capital of the Tang (618-907). The food was laid out beautifully and the tableware was extravagant. As the ingredients simmered in the chafing pot, tongues of fire shot out through the perforated wall of the engraved metal brazier, adding further visual delight. The

(Continued on page 104)



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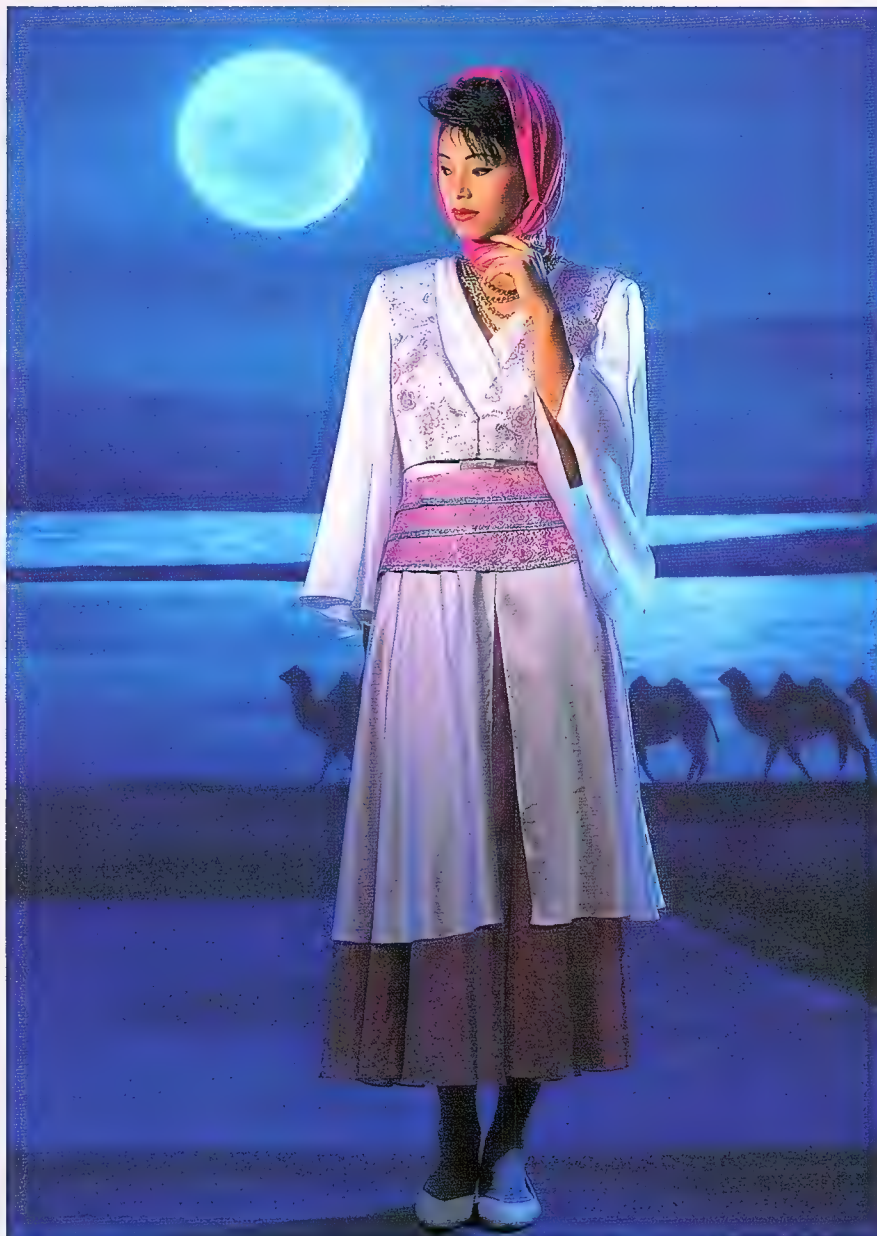
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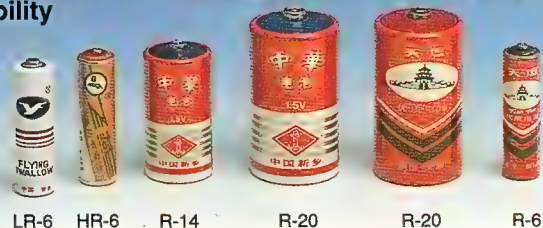
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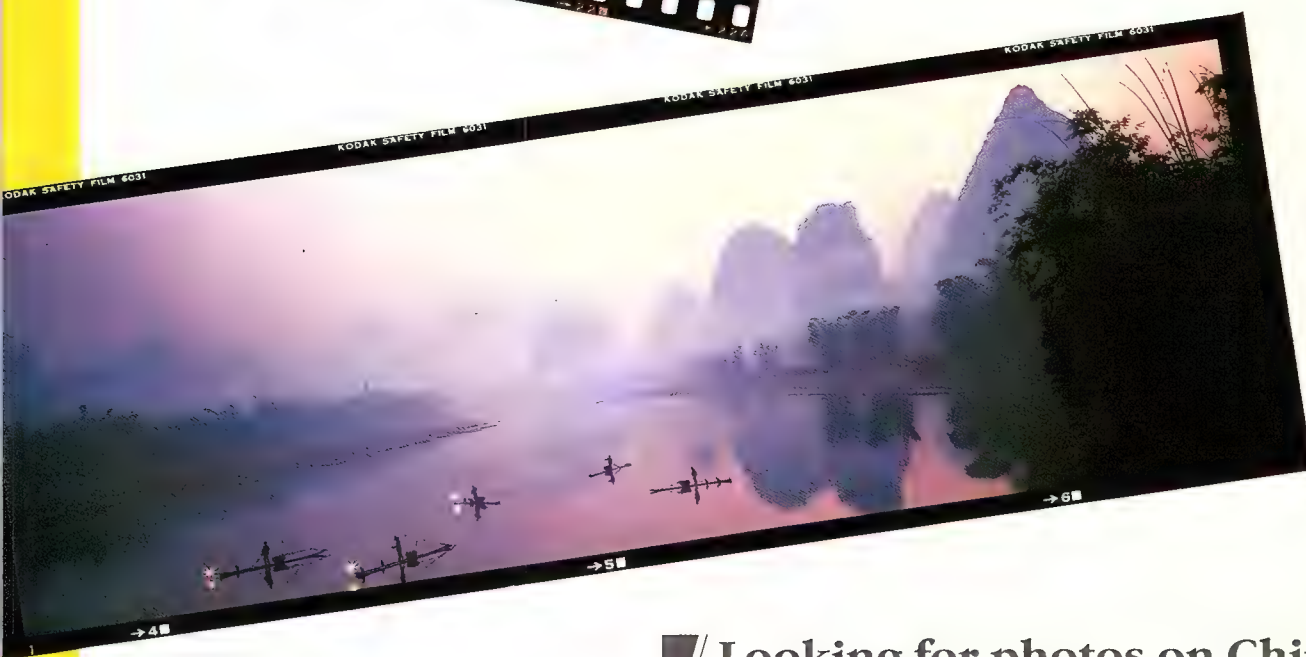
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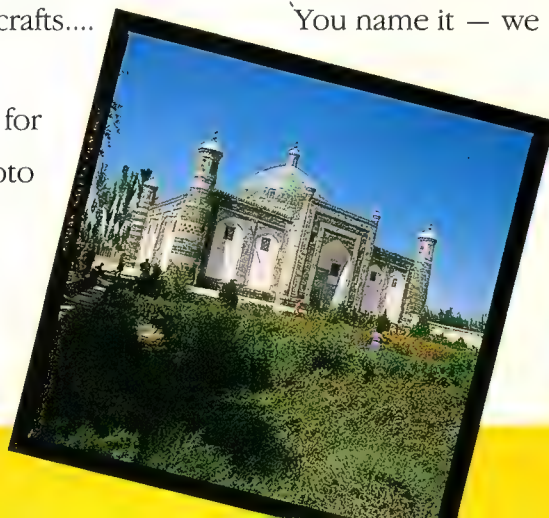
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2

The Qingxiling or Western Qing Mausoleums lie at the foot of the Yongning Mountains to the west of Yixian County, Hebei Province, 120 kilometres southwest of Beijing. They comprise the tombs of emperors Yongzheng, Jiaqing, Daoguang and Guangxu as well as those of nine empresses, fifty-seven imperial concubines, and sundry princes, princesses and other members of the imperial household. In all seventy-six dignitaries of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) are buried in this complex.

Within an area of 800 square kilometres, fourteen imperial mausoleums are set among pines and cypresses. Commenced in 1730 (the eighth year of the Yongzheng reign), this is one of the three major cemeteries of the Qing court, the others being the site of the Manchu ancestral tombs at Shenyang in Liaoning Province and the Eastern Qing Mausoleums, located 125 kilometres northeast of Beijing.

The construction started with the Tailing Mausoleum, intended for Yongzheng (reign dates 1723-1735), the first emperor to be buried here. Yongzheng was the fourth son of Emperor Kangxi (reign dates 1662-1722), who had actually bequeathed the throne to his fourteenth son. But Yongzheng altered his father's deathbed decree to read 'fourth son', not difficult at all in Chinese — a matter of two simple strokes. Since Yongzheng thus ascended the imperial throne through trickery, it is said that he was afraid to have himself buried close to his father in the



3

Solitary Splendour at the Western Qing Mausoleums

PHOTOS & ARTICLE BY PENG ZHENG



existing Eastern Qing Mausoleums, and instead chose this as an auspicious site for his tomb.

As I approached the Tailing Mausoleum one misty morning, I was greeted by red walls and yellow tiles: a solemn and peaceful sight. A 'sacred way' or 'spirit way' leads to the mausoleum through a series of buildings set harmoniously to left and right. These include the Dressing Hall, where the principal worshipper in the imperial sacrifices would change his robe before performing the rites. The 'sacred way' leads north through ten pairs of stone sculptures of animals and civil and military officials. Stonemasons were busy, the sound of their chisels reverberating over the babblings of a river where water lilies were in bloom. There were

knots of tourists walking around in twos and threes, but not the great mobs you sometimes encounter at other imperial sites.

This is the largest of the mausoleums here. The spacious main hall — Long'endian or Hall of Eminent Favour — has a ceiling painted with colourful pictures while the rafters are decorated with dots of gold like coins. This is where offerings were made in honour of the deceased. The floor is as smooth and as polished as a mirror, reflecting light as though it were water. It is built of a special kind of brick made in Suzhou. The bricks were first smoked in a kiln with burning chaff and straw for one month, then fired with split kindling then logs for another month each. But this was not all! They were then fired for forty

days with pine wood before being removed from the kiln.

Behind the hall are two gates, a set of stone sacrificial vessels and a stele tower atop a square rampart. Beneath this rampart lies the 'underground palace', the actual tomb chamber of the emperor.

The Qing dynasty was established by the Manchus from the northeast when, having grown immensely powerful, they forced their way through the Shanhaiguan Pass at the eastern end of the Great Wall. They proceeded to

The complex today has a rather neglected, forlorn look (1 and 3), but its setting amid pines and cypresses is magnificent (2).



1



conquer China from east to west. The rulers called themselves 'emperors on horseback' and took great pride in their battlefield prowess. But, after China's defeat in the Opium War of 1840, the Qing court was forced to cede territory and pay indemnities to sundry foreign powers.

Emperor Daoguang (reign dates 1821-1850) was ashamed to face his ancestors in the light of this perceived weakness and decline so, in addition to his normally relatively thrifty practices, he decided to build his mausoleum on a modest scale. White marble serves as the foundation while the walls are of grey brick, making this, the Muling Mausoleum, elegant but rather plain outside. It is certainly different from the final resting places of Yongzheng, Kangxi and Qianlong (the latter two at the Eastern Qing Mausoleums). In particular, it is conspicuous by the absence of any elaborate *pailou* or archway praising his merits as an emperor.

Built between 1832 and 1836, this mausoleum is located five kilometres away from Tailing. Its relative remoteness means that, when I was there, even though it was a Sunday, there were few other visitors.

The eaves of the main hall rest on pillars consisting of the trunks of the most precious *nanmu* trees, so big around it takes two people to embrace one. The surface of each pillar is coated with wax but left unpainted. Every square on the checkered ceiling and every rafter and beam — all of *nanmu* — is carved with dragon designs. Now it is natural to see dragons, the symbol of emperorhood, in Chinese imperial architecture, but not in the overwhelming quantities to be seen here. The reason lies in the following tale.

Originally, a tomb for Daoguang was erected at the Eastern Qing Mausoleums. After its completion his wife, Empress Xiaomu, died and was buried there. But one night her spirit appeared to him, asking for help; she seemed to be drowning. Daoguang sent men to inspect the tomb and it was found that water had penetrated into the underground palace. The infuriated emperor ordered the tomb to be dismantled and a new one to be built at the Western Qing Mausoleums. In addition, believing that the first tomb had been



4

flooded because the construction work had displaced dragons from their underground burrows, forcing them to dig holes for new ones, the emperor ordered dragon motifs to be carved all over the main hall to appease them.

Behind the hall there is a moat. I crossed a bridge to a high marble platform on which stands an exquisite marble archway, so glossy that your hand slips off it. On the lintel is inscribed a text written by Daoguang after the completion of the tomb.

Further back still is a sacrificial platform, again of marble, and beyond that the round grave mound behind a high screen wall of grey brick. Daoguang was afraid that people might trample on his grave, so he had the high wall built to prevent them from doing so. The surrounding walls are built in a semi-circle like the echoing wall at the Altar of Heaven in the Tiantan (Temple of Heaven) Park in Beijing.

One of the best-known romantic tales about Qing palace life concerns Emperor Guangxu (reign dates 1875-1908) and Zhenfei, the Pearl Concubine. Even today, traditional Cantonese opera includes an episode in its repertoire called *Emperor Guangxu Mourns for Zhenfei at Night*.

Zhenfei was one of two sisters chosen as possible brides for Guangxu when she was only thirteen. She became an imperial concubine at nineteen and was much loved by the emperor, which unfortunately incurred the displeasure of his aunt, the formidable Dowager Empress Cixi. At the time of the 1898 Reform Movement Zhenfei is said to have told reformists about con-

Quiet harmony of bronze, white marble and grey brick (1 and 4). The Tailing Mausoleum (3 and 5) is reached by a 'sacred way' lined by statues of animals and officials (6). Complementing the atmosphere perfectly — the Qingxiling Hotel (2).



5



6



fidential court matters. After the failure of the movement, Guangxu — who favoured reform — was imprisoned at Yingtai in the Zhongnanhai Palace while Zhenfei was placed in isolation and forbidden further contact with the emperor. In 1900, when the Eight-Power Allied Forces invaded and sacked Beijing, the Dowager Empress ordered the unfortunate concubine to commit suicide by jumping into a well before she herself fled to Xi'an in Shaanxi. Some versions say that Cixi had her thrown into the well by her chief eunuch.

A postscript to this true story is that, in 1915, Zhenfei was interred at Chongling, Guangxu's mausoleum, in what is known as the Concubines' Tomb. Chrysanthemums of yellow and white, the colours of mourning, grow luxuriantly before her grave and that of her sister Jinfei. The ground is paved with bricks which are overgrown with grass, the whole forming a harmony of colour and mood, with the red walls lending the tomb a dignified and regal appearance. Chongling itself was built in 1909 and was the last imperial tomb to be constructed. The emperor who followed Guangxu was the child Puyi (reign dates 1909-1911), and he, of course, died as a commoner after the founding of the People's Republic.

During my visit to the Western Qing Mausoleums I stayed at a modern hotel converted from a former imperial residence used by successive emperors during ritual tomb-sweeping visits. Constructed in the early Qianlong reign (1736-1795), it once sheltered the Dowager Empress Cixi. The hotel staff, including the cooks, are mostly of Manchu nationality and are said to be descendants of the imperial tomb-custodians. They produce very good food — chicken, beef cooked in soy sauce, and 'lotus elbow', the upper part of a leg of pork — said to have been among the favourite dishes of Emperor Qianlong. Other dishes which took my own fancy were the small cakes, the donkey's meat cooked in soy sauce, and the beancurd with shallots.

Translated by He Fei

The plain marble archway at the Muling Mausoleum is inscribed with a text by Emperor Daoguang (1), the main hall of this mausoleum being of precious nanmu wood (2). Green was the colour reserved for the imperial concubines, here seen in architecture at the Concubines' Tomb at Chongling (3), site of the final resting place of Zhenfei, the ill-fated Pearl Concubine (4).



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Rongcheng's Lantern Festival

PHOTOS & TEXT BY SONG WEIDONG

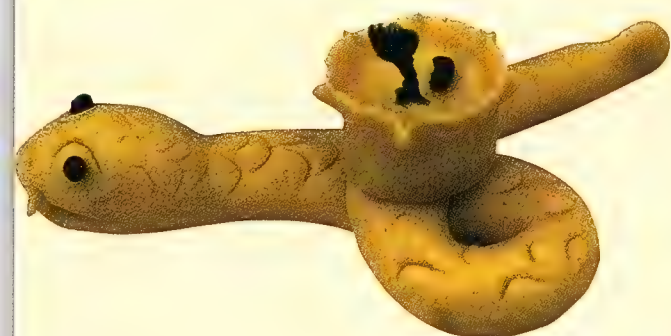


The Lantern Festival falls on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, at the end of the Spring Festival celebrations (generally in February). In most places in China, this involves admiring beautifully made lanterns and guessing the riddles which are inscribed on many of them. But the people of Rongcheng County at the eastern tip of the Shandong Peninsula, in the province of that name, have a quite different custom.

They use dough made from soybean flour to fashion little lamps in the shape of the animals which symbolize birth years, one for each member of the family. These animals are the equivalent of the signs of the zodiac commonly used in the West. Ancient Chinese mathematicians selected twelve animals to represent the twelve Earthly Branches, terms used in conjunction with the ten Heavenly Stems in a sixty-year cycle to indicate hour, day, month and year in the lunar calendar. The twelve are as follows: Rat, Ox, Tiger, Hare, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Cock, Dog and Pig. People born in the year of, say, the Horse are believed to have certain characteristics in common with 'their' animal.

When night falls on the date of the Lantern Festival in Rongcheng, the whole family sits down in a circle, each person lighting the lamp related to his or her birth sign and tending it





carefully, all the while chatting and joking. The belief is that whoever's lamp burns the longest will live longest.

The first step in producing such animal lamps is to make up a batch of dough from soybean flour. The dough has to be of a fairly firm consistency; if it is too soft, it will not hold its shape. The lump of dough is cut up into pieces of appropriate size. The person making the lamps then moulds and kneads the dough balls into the desired shape, using a small pair of scissors to form the mouth, ears, nose or snout, beard, whiskers, mane or whatever. As the saying goes: 'Practice makes perfect.' Gradually the dignified dragon, the spirited horse, the gluttonous pig and the clever monkey take shape, each with its own expression. The last step is to press on two black beans as eyes.

Apart from the 'twelve animal' lamps, a great variety of other animal-shaped lamps are made: fish, monkeys, toads, chickens.... Each of these has a particular significance and must be put in a certain place in the household. For example, a fish lamp placed in the water vat signifies 'surplus every year', because the Chinese characters for 'fish' and 'surplus' are homonyms. A monkey lamp set on the roof beam of a barn or house will guard the premises; a chicken-shaped lamp is placed in the hen coop to ensure the safety of the family's poultry; and a lamp in the shape of a toad, the symbol for money bags, is set at the threshold to draw in wealth and riches!

Translated by Chen Jiaji



Han-Dynasty Depictions of Legends

PHOTOS BY WANG YAOJIN

TEXT BY WANG YAOJIN & YE FENG



During the Han dynasty, it became the custom to have a chambered tomb lined with stone slabs or bricks which were carved with scenes from everyday life but also with the legends current at that time. There were regional variations and stylistic changes during the course of the dynasty, but in central and southwestern Henan a special form of square tomb constructed of decorated stone slabs has been found. The decoration on the slabs can be described as combining painting and carving, with a mixture of incised lines and bas-relief.

Pangu, Fuxi and Nüwa

According to legend, it was Pangu who, in the days of chaos, separated heaven from earth by means of an axe. The sky gained in height by one *zhang* (2.5 metres) while the earth deepened and Pangu himself grew by the same amount ... every day. This went on for 18,000 years. A millennium later, Pangu died and his body disintegrated to form the sun, moon, stars, wind and clouds, mountains and rivers: in short, all the elements of the universe.

Pangu is the giant in this bas-relief. In his hands he holds mankind's first ancestors — Fuxi and Nüwa, the brother and sister born to the Water Spirit who between them created the first humans and taught them to fish, hunt and domesticate animals; Fuxi also invented the Eight Trigrams used in divination. They are typically shown with the upper body in human form and wearing a hat, while the lower body is snake-like. This then is the ancient Chinese equivalent of the Christian creation story.



Artistic and decorative works in stone excavated from the tombs of nobles and dignitaries of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220) are now on display at the Han-Dynasty Stone Relief Museum in Nanyang, Henan Province.

Located in southwestern Henan, Nanyang was a town of strategic importance in the State of Chu of the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.) in the eighth century B.C. At a later date, it was the birthplace of Liu Xiu, who became Emperor Guangwu (reign dates 25-57) of the Eastern Han dynasty. Although the dynastic capital was at Luoyang, further north, many members of the imperial family and nobility lived in Nanyang and were buried there. This accounts for the large amount of stonework of high quality found in tomb excavations in the Nanyang area.



◁ **Chang'e Flies to the Moon**

Houyi, a leader of the Dongyi tribe of the legendary Xia dynasty and a superb archer, shot down nine of the ten suns in the sky, thereby reducing the great heat and glare which made life unbearable and permitting the crops to thrive. Later he managed to get hold of the elixir of life. Unfortunately, one day in his absence his wife, Chang'e, stole it and drank it in the hope that she would become immortal. Instead she flew to the palace of the moon. The ancient Chinese revered Chang'e as the Moon Spirit. She is generally shown as a beautiful woman in a graceful pose, garments fluttering as she ascends through the skies. We can see the basics for the more glamorous later versions in this Han-dynasty representation.

Nüba Devoured

Nüba, daughter of Huangdi, the Yellow Emperor, a tribal leader of ancient times, is said to have helped her father in her capacity as the Goddess of Drought. His main rival, Chiyao, had called upon the God of Thunder who raised a great storm. Nüba summoned all her resources to disperse the wind and rain but, weakened, was unable to return to heaven. She was left to wander on earth, bringing drought and devastation to the places she visited. She was shunned and feared by humans.

In this bas-relief strong lines are employed in the delineation of the (from left) tiger, bear and winged tiger devouring Nüba, symbolizing the wish for an end to natural calamities.





◁ **Three-Legged Bird**

It is the three-legged bird — possibly based on a crow — which seeks and gathers delicious tidbits for the dinner table of the Queen Mother of the West, Xiwangmu. In this depiction, however, it is flying into the sun. Why?

The existence of sunspots had been discovered even prior to the Han dynasty. In the *Han Shu* (*History of the Han Dynasty*), written two thousand years ago in the late Han, there is a reference to a sunspot discovered during the third month of the lunar calendar. Described as 'black vapour', the spot was said to be as big as a coin in the centre of the sun. The three-legged bird may be an attempt at explaining this natural phenomenon by ancient people without recourse to a scientific explanation.

Golden Sun Bird



In this carving, the sun is represented as the belly of a great bird. According to Chinese legend, the sun is transported across the sky by the Golden Sun Bird as it flies from east to west. That is why the sun rises in the east and sets in the west! The Golden Sun Bird is seen carrying the sun as it passes amid twirling clouds and stars.





◁ The Thunder God

On the right of this bas-relief we see a chariot laden with a drum and drawn by three tigers. The drum on a high stand is protected by a canopy decorated with feathered insignia. On both sides of the drum stands a human figure with a hat and a cape (or possibly wings). From the ancient belief that thunder was the sound of a drum being beaten in heaven, we can infer that this is the chariot of the God of Thunder (this god is often portrayed with wings), complete with charioteer. The chariot floats on the clouds while the sinuous, elongated shapes of the fierce tigers increase the impression of flight through the sky at great speed.

Azure Dragon Constellation ▷

According to the ancients, there were twenty-eight constellations. They based their calculations on the orbit of the moon around the celestial sphere, which took twenty-eight days. There were four great divisions of the universe corresponding to the four quarters of the heavens, with seven stars allotted to each division. The four divisions are known as the Azure Dragon (east), Scarlet Bird (south), White Tiger (west) and Black Warrior (north), the latter made up of the tortoise and snake.

The sculptor has conceived of the Azure Dragon as a snake-like flying dragon with a very long tail. It is formed by, in all, eighteen stars. Hanging above is the full moon, inhabited by a hare — thought to pound the drugs of immortality up there — and a toad, variously interpreted as the companion or the embodiment of Chang'e. ☐

Translated by He Fei



A Night in the Shadow of



If you want to watch the sun rise over the Great Wall at Badaling, the only place to stay the night there without camping out in the open is the Mingyuan Hotel!

Around twenty kilometres from the Great Wall, the hotel is less than fifteen minutes' drive from the Ming Tombs, which are forty-four kilometres northwest of Beijing proper. The two-storeyed hotel is built in the style of an imperial mansion. Above its entrance there is a black signboard bearing the characters of its name in gold.

Despite the very traditional exterior, this is a first-class hotel with all the amenities. From the modern lobby we were shown to our rooms along the corridor which zigzags its way through the complex. The rooms — 120 standard and 28 suites — are arranged around courtyards to resemble the quadrangle layout typical of old Beijing.

Rooms are well-furnished with porcelain *objets d'art* on display and Chinese brushes and inkstones set out on the writing desk. Even if you don't know how to use these traditional tools of the Chinese scholar, you have to admit they add a certain air of elegance to the atmosphere.

I went out to look around. The hotel garden is small but refined, a garden in the classical mould with halls and pavilions scattered around a pond spanned by small bridges and shaded by weeping willows. Although clearly artificial, it is well laid out. And the buildings, although new, have been constructed with care and attention to detail, using the materials which would have been employed for the buildings — probably from the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) — on which they are mod-

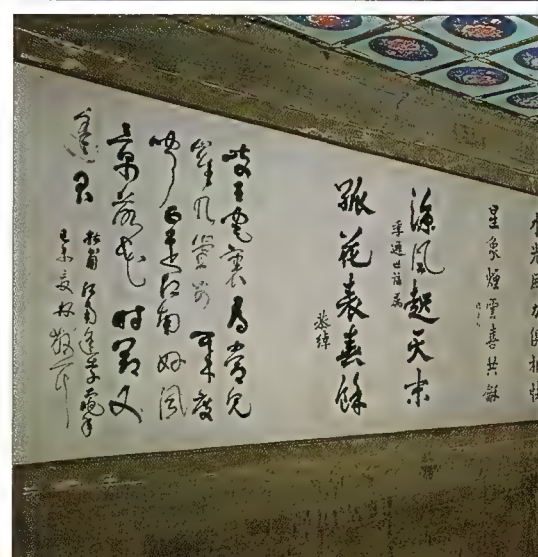




Photo by Wang Wenbo

the Ming Tombs

PHOTOS & TEXT BY LAM KIN FAI

elled. In fact, the hotel aims at combining the features of the classical southern Chinese garden with the imperial architecture of northern China. While meeting the needs of guests who expect up-to-date accommodation, it harmonizes well with its countryside setting and, thanks to its red pillars, painted beams and black roof-tiles, with the imperial sites close at hand.

In the evening, the hotel was wonderfully peaceful. Who would have guessed that this dignified place has a disco as well as extensive banqueting facilities tucked away somewhere?

I strolled through the courtyards under the light cast by the galleries. I found an English couple already occupying one of the choicest spots. It turned out that they worked for a joint-venture company nearby and had been staying in the hotel for more than six months. They told me that after dinner every day they would take the chairs out of their room and sit enjoying the evening air, the birdsong and the insects chirping. In their opinion, the garden had been a particularly attractive sight after a snowfall during the winter.

It was a cool night and the air-conditioning in my room proved superfluous. Next morning I and my friends were up at half past four to reach the Great Wall at Badaling in time. But having climbed to a commanding position, all ready to capture the dawn colours, I was disappointed to find that our efforts had been in vain. The sky was covered in clouds and the sun whimpered rather than burst into view. We could do nothing but curse our luck. But at least we could look back on a pleasant night at the Mingyuan Hotel!



Translated by Gu Weizhou



Photo by Wang Wenbo





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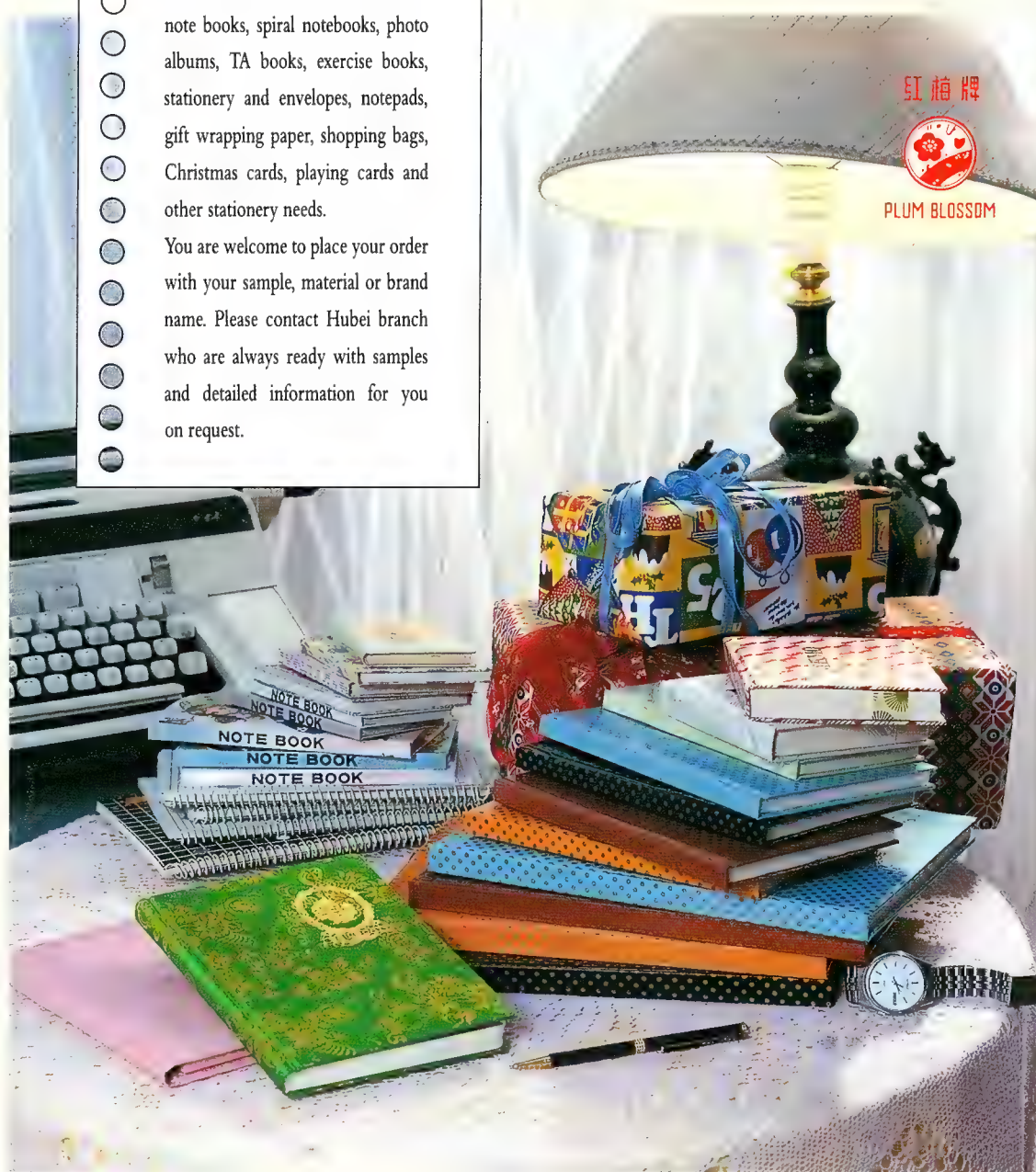
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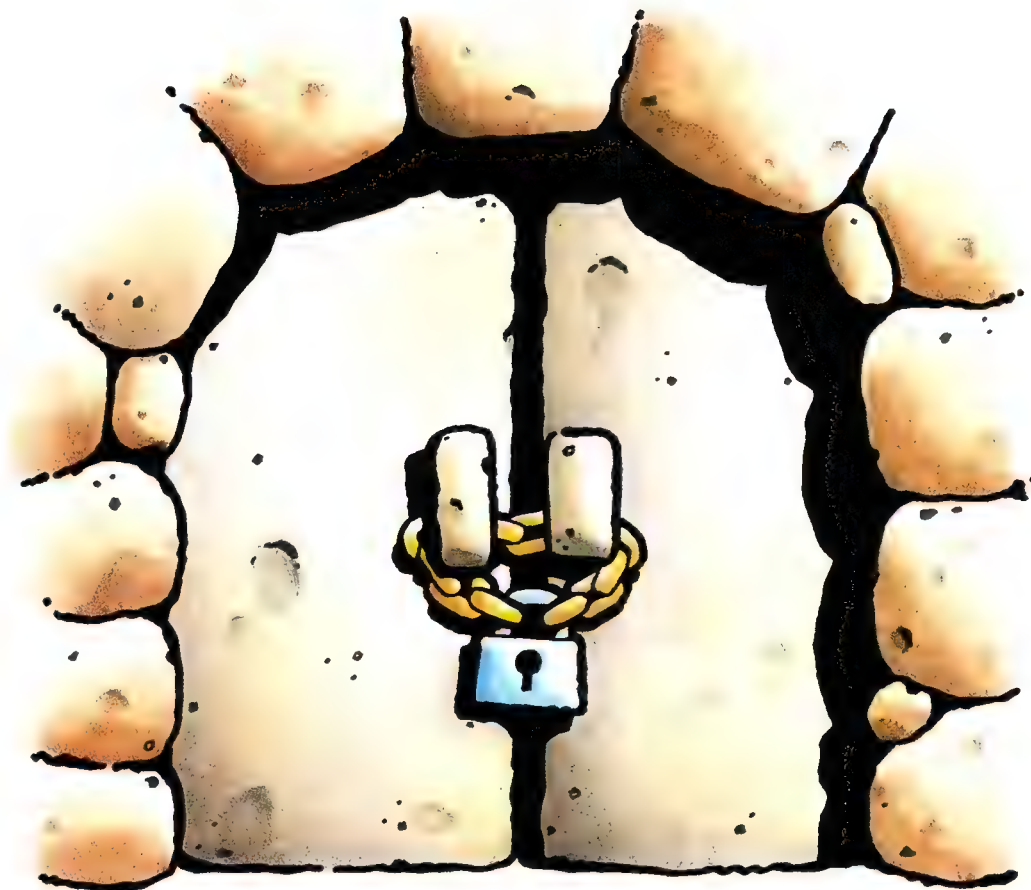
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**Brief Introduction to Hubei Provincial Light Industrial
Products Import & Export Corporation**

Legal Representative: General Manager Wu Juhua

Hubei Provincial Light Industrial Products Imp. & Exp. Corporation (HBL) was established in 1958. As a comprehensive trade corporation, it mainly dealt in the allocation of light industrial and chemical products as well as in arts & crafts. In 1973, some light industrial products were exported to Hong Kong and Macau.

By the end of 1984, the present name came into use and the company became the only corporation specializing in the import and export of light industrial products in Hubei Province. In 1988 HBL began to handle its own affairs and to assume sole responsibility for profits and losses, to intergrate industry and trade and to act as agent.

HBL consists of eleven business departments —

BUT WE CAN!



General Merchandise, Footware Dept., Paper & Paper Products Dept., Plastic Products Dept., Suitcases & Bags Dept., Electrical Appliances & Building Materials Dept., Stationery & Sports Goods Dept., Joint Operation & Development Dept., Import Dept. — and nine comprehensive service departments. Exports include glassware, enamelware, aluminiumware, bicycles, suitcases, bags, footwear, detergent powders, cosmetics, plastic products, stationeries, paper and paper products, toys, building materials, and household electric appliances.

Apart from import and export, HBL also deals in the processing business with supplied or imported materials, compensation trade, barter trade and other forms of cooperations.

In 1988 export value reached US\$38,000,000, a huge increase from 1971, when the figure was only one million. The total amount of import and export rose to US\$45,000,000 in 1988.

Enjoying high international prestige, HBL has established good business relations with its counterparts in more than 100 countries and regions. It is marketing its products mainly to Hong Kong, Macau, Southeast Asia, Japan, western Europe, North America, Latin America, the Soviet Union and Africa.

By adhering to our principles of strictly abiding by our contracts, keeping our promises, and working towards equality and mutual benefit, HBL has established and strengthened its business relations with friends all over the world.

General Manager: Wu Juhua • Vice General Manager: Xie Shengyuan, Liu Yan

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Hotels in Suzhou and Wuxi

ARTICLE BY ALEX TAI



Photo by Alex Tai

Most people who come to Shanghai on business, if they can spare the time, visit the nearby cities of Suzhou and Wuxi. Suzhou, for example, is only about one hundred kilometres from the Shanghai city centre, and both cities are charming places, ideal for a short break from a hectic schedule.

For centuries Suzhou, with its ancient architecture and delicately landscaped gardens, has been a favourite destination of travellers in China. However, these days, so many of the visitors to Suzhou are business people who come there for only a day or two before returning to Shanghai. As a result, the rate at which new hotels have been built in Suzhou is well below that of other cities. However, one of the new hotels more than compensates. It is the Bamboo Grove Hotel which opened in October last year.

The Bamboo Grove, built to resemble local homes with their beautifully landscaped gardens, provides an ambience of elegant restfulness. One of the best features of the hotel is the architect's use of space and light to create an open and airy feeling inside the hotel. The garden atmosphere is one of luxury and serenity, and each guest is treated to a view of the garden as every room faces out to it.

Other amenities include two standard tennis courts, the only ones in the city, and the business centre which is not the only one in Suzhou, but it is certainly the best.

The centre offers IDD, fax and telex facilities, as well as photocopying, typing and translation services.

Another good choice for a hotel in Suzhou is the Nanlin Hotel at Shiquan Street. The main attraction of this hotel is that it has managed to retain an air of seclusion while offering excellent restaurants and shops. Another of its attractions for tourists is its proximity to tourist destinations including the Wangshiyuan (Master Nets Garden), Canglang (Blue Waves) Pavilion, the city's oldest garden, Wenmiao Temple and Shuangta (Double Pagoda) Court, all within walking distance.

Two other possibilities are the Suzhou and Gusu Hotels, which stand together at the east end of Shiquan Street. Of the four hotels mentioned, I would primarily recommend the Bamboo Grove, but if you want to pay less and you prefer facilities over location, then I would suggest either the Suzhou or the Gusu over the Nanlin Hotel.

Wuxi lies only about a half hour away from Suzhou by the Shanghai-Nanjing Railroad. If you wish to visit Lake Taihu, China's third largest lake, then Wuxi is a must on your itinerary and, if you want to stay right near the lake, book your room at the Hubin (Lakeside) Hotel.

The Hubin Hotel is approximately ten kilometres outside the Wuxi city centre, but the lake view is well worth any inconvenience staying here might cause. The hotel itself is hardly an imposing structure, and since only half its rooms face the lake (the other half face some factories) be sure to ask for the lake view when making your reservations.

If you prefer to stay in Wuxi itself, there are several hotels from which to choose. 1990 saw the completion of two new hotels, the Wuxi Grand Hotel and the Milido Hotel. The Wuxi Grand is a four-star hotel and is considered one of the two best in Jiangsu Province. It is a Sino-Japanese joint venture, well managed by the Tokyu Group of Japan. However, its triangular design makes the lobby and shops appear crowded and the entire area has the feel of a commercial building.

On the plus side is the food, which was tastefully prepared and well served. One of the hotel managers told me that in order to maintain a high standard in its food and beverage department, the hotel has determined the minimum time needed to prepare a banquet, and no amount of money will persuade them to put on a hastily prepared meal in which their high standards are sacrificed.

SUZHOU

Bamboo Grove Hotel

竹園飯店



Photo by Alex Tai

Zhu Hui Rd., Suzhou 215006
Tel: 225601, 227601 Telex: 363073 BGHSZ Fax: 778778
GM: P.K. Wong
Opened November 1990
384 rooms (363 rooms and 21 suites)
Rates: room US\$65-80, suite US\$95-1,000
Distance/time from Shanghai and Wuxi airports and Suzhou railway station: 2 hrs, 1½ hrs, 7 km/15 min respectively
Located in the old section of Suzhou
Facilities: Business centre (incl. IDD, telex, fax, photocopying), 2 Chinese restaurants, coffee shop, piano bar, disco, health club, 2 outdoor tennis courts, multi-function hall

Friendship Hotel

友誼賓館

Zhu Hui Rd., Suzhou 215007
Tel: 221601, 222601, 773518 Telex: 363042 FGH SZ
GM: Cheng Wumin
85 rooms

Garden Hotel

園外樓飯店



99 Liuyuan Rd., Suzhou 215008
Tel: 331559, 331013, 332013
GM: Zhu Jun
158 rooms

Gusu Hotel

姑蘇飯店

115 Shiquan, Suzhou 215006
Tel: 224689, 227939 Telex: 34401 SZT LX
GM: Zheng Weihao
116 rooms

It was built as an extension to the Suzhou Hotel, the facilities of which are also available

Nanlin Hotel

南林飯店

20 Gunxiang Fung Rd., Shiquan St, Suzhou 215006
Tel: 224641 Telex: 363063 NLHSZ CN Fax: 771028
GM: Lu Juquan
294 rooms



Facilities: Restaurants, coffee shop, bar, health centre, shopping arcade, post office

Royal Garden Hotel

蘇苑飯店
99 Renmin Rd. South, Suzhou 215007
Tel: 721621 Telex: 363030 RGHSZ CN Fax: 722313
GM: Zhong Mingan
98 rooms

Suzhou (Soochow) Hotel

蘇州飯店



115 Shiquan St., Suzhou 215006
Tel: 224646 Telex: 363002 SZTLX Fax: 771015
GM: Fang Mouben
145 rooms and 2 suites
Rates: Standard around US\$42
Facilities: Restaurants, conference room, shopping arcade

Xucheng Mansions

胥城大廈
120 Sanxiang Rd., Suzhou 215004
Tel: 331928, 334855 Telex: 363037 XCHSZ CN Fax: 731520
GM: Gu Hengru
290 rooms

WUXI

Hubin Hotel

湖濱飯店



Photo by Alex Tai

Liyuan Garden, Hubin Rd., Wuxi 214075
Tel: 668812, 665591 Telex: 362002 WXHB CN
Fax: 202637
GM: Xia Yusheng
207 rooms and suites
Rates: Lake view (6th floor and above) FEC¥185, mountain view FEC¥150, suite FEC¥280
Facilities: Restaurant, banquet hall, theatre, shops, swimming pool

Jingshanlou Hotel

景山樓飯店



5 Xihui Rd., Wuxi 214035
Tel: 665981, 668880
Manager: Zhang Boxing

Jinyuan State Guesthouse

錦園國賓館

Xiaojishan Hill, Wuxi
Tel: 22934
35 rooms
Formerly reserved for official guests, this guesthouse is a rather exclusive villa, perhaps more suitable for deluxe tour groups.

Liangxi Hotel

梁溪飯店

South Zhongshan Rd., Wuxi 214001
Tel: 226812 Telex: 362074 LXHWX CN
GM: Zong Quanping

Milido Hotel

美麗都大酒店



2 Liangxi Rd., Wuxi 214061
Tel: 665665 Telex: 362029 WMLD CN Fax: 200668
250 rooms and suites
Rates: Standard US\$50, 40-60% discount for tour groups
Facilities: Business centre with telex, fax, photocopying, translation, courier and secretarial services, restaurants and bars, karaoke, disco, billiard room, massage room, function hall, shopping arcade

Shuixiu Hotel

水秀飯店

Liyuan Garden, Hubin Rd., Wuxi 214075
Tel: 668591 Telex: 362002 WXHB CN

GM: Xia Yusheng
162 rooms
Standard: FEC¥85
Located next to the Hubin Hotel

Taihu Jingminglou Hotel

太湖景明樓賓館

Taihu Jingshenglou Hotel

太湖鏡聲樓賓館

Meiji Rd., Wuxi 214064
Tel: 667901, 668398 Telex: 362012 WXTUH CN
100 and 162 rooms and suites respectively
Rates at Jingminglou: Standard US\$40-50, Suite US\$80-200
Rates at Jingshenglou: Standard FEC¥120
Facilities: Restaurants, function hall, disco, bar, coffee shop, massage and billiard rooms, shops, telex, fax, typing and photocopying services

Wuxi Grand Hotel

無錫大飯店

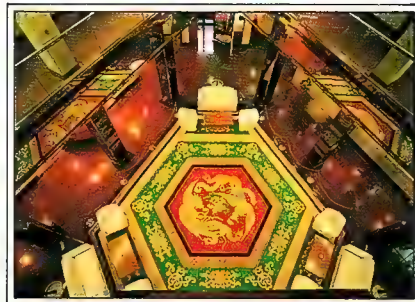


Photo by Alex Tai



Photo by Alex Tai

1 Liangqing Rd., Wuxi
Tel: 666789 Telex: 362055 WXGHL CN Fax: 200991
342 rooms and suites
Rates: Standard US\$70-90, Suite US\$100-150
Facilities: Business centre, banquet and function halls, 2 Chinese restaurants, Japanese restaurant, coffee shop, lobby bar, karaoke lounge, shopping arcade, mini-gym, swimming pool

The Painted Ware of

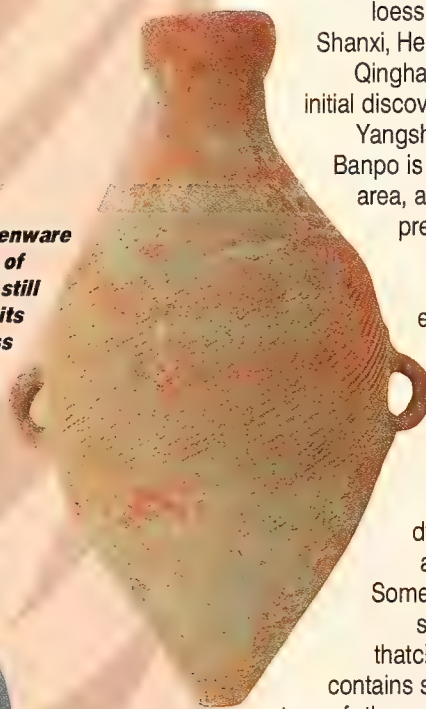


Urns and earthenware jars from an ancient Banpo kitchen

Prior to the Neolithic, humans subsisted by hunting and gathering. As mankind entered the Neolithic age around 6,000 years B.C., gradually turning to systematic cultivation of crops and animal husbandry, the conditions of life improved greatly. Pottery making also developed as a result of the need for storage vessels and containers for crops and foodstuffs with the more settled lifestyle.

Painted pottery dating back six thousand years is displayed in the Banpo Museum in the eastern suburbs of Xi'an, Shaanxi Province. Excavation started at Banpo in 1954, and the museum was erected at the dig site four years later. The pottery belongs to the Yangshao Culture which developed in the middle and lower reaches of the Huanghe (Yellow River) and its subsidiary the Weihe and spread over the fertile loess lands of present-day Shaanxi, Shanxi, Henan and Hebei to Gansu and even Qinghai. This culture was named after the initial discoveries made in 1921 in the village of Yangshao near Mianchi, Henan Province. Banpo is the earliest known site in the Xi'an area, as well as the biggest and the best-preserved found to date. It is thought

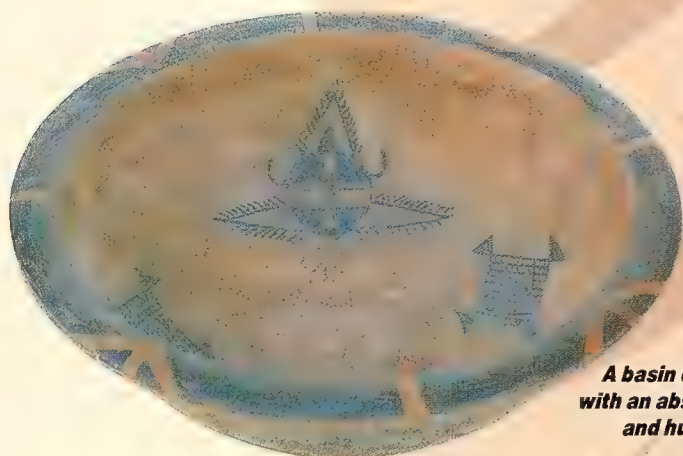
This lugged earthenware jar, in the colours of Greek amphorae, still displays much of its original brightness



that the village was occupied from about 4,500 to 3,750 B.C. The excavated part of the village covers 10,000 square metres, and is roughly oval in shape. The northern section consists of a cemetery containing 250 graves, while in the south is a residential area with the ruins of forty-five dwellings, two animal pens or folds, and over two hundred storage pits. Some of the houses were round, others square, with a wooden frame and a thatched roof. The northeastern section contains six kilns for the firing of pottery. On

top of these discoveries, over ten thousand tools and items of everyday use were found, including stone hatchets, knives, shovels, millstones, arrowheads, and bone needles and fish hooks.

All this proves that Banpo was a thriving community, and only when you have enough to eat and when life is settled can you pursue art.



A basin decorated with an abstract fish and human face

Banpo

PHOTOS & TEXT
BY YANG LIMIN




**Another
amphora-type
earthenware
jar with
a modernistic
abstract design**

Banpo painted pottery is a product of this historic condition, an early expression of artistic and creative strivings. From the huge amount of fine-grained, burnished, painted pottery found, from the shapes of the pots and the motifs used in decorating them, we can deduce something about the lifestyle and interests of Banpo man ... or perhaps it would be better to say (this having been a matriarchal society) of Banpo woman.

Basins, cooking pots, bowls and jars — even earthenware steamers — were in daily use at Banpo. A striking feature of the painted designs on these items are the many animal images, including fish and deer, as well as human faces. The most complex designs appear inside a few shallow bowls like the one shown here. They are composed of human faces or masks combined with fishes. Even the three triangular projections from the mask, fringed with short strokes, bear a resemblance to fish bodies and fins. There are also net-like motifs.

The people of Banpo lived beside the River Chanhe, so fish formed an important part of their diet and fishing would have been a major activity. It is thought that fish may even have been the Banpo totem. Experts believe that elements of the fish (the eye, the tail) formed the basis for the abstract geometrical designs which eventually developed.

The reddish colour of the basin is due to oxidization of iron in the clay when fired. The colour tends to be thick and deep, giving a sense of rustic simplicity. The mask and fish motif painted on the inside of the basin are black, produced when pigments containing iron and manganese are fired.

The second example is an amphora-type earthenware vessel, its form perfect for carrying water. This simple but beautiful jar, held by a cord attached to the two lugs, would tip over when lowered empty into a river and right itself as it filled up with water. It could then be carried easily like a modern-day canteen. 



**This fish, created
thousands of years
ago, would feel right at
home in any modern art gallery**

**The geometrical
designs on this
jar may be Banpo
abstracts of an
original fish motif**



**Inside the Banpo Museum with its
ancient pottery displayed in situ**



Rural Insights in a Shandong Village

Shandong Province presents many faces to the world: the prosperous, pretty university and port city of Qingdao; Mount Tai-shan — the sacred mountain — rising dramatically from the plain; ancient Qufu, birthplace of Confucius.... Yet, as you travel across the flat heart of the province, by train or by road, it is its agricultural face which predominates as farming families tend the long strips which run parallel to the aqueducts across the yellow-brown plain.

This plain was formed by the Huanghe (Yellow River) depositing silt as it changed course some twenty-six times through history. Six times it has swung its mouth from the Bohai Gulf on the northern side of the Shandong Peninsula to the Yellow Sea on the south. Floods have alternated with drought, causing untold hardships, but the end result is soil which is extremely fertile.

If you visit the province in autumn, as I did, you pass fields white with cotton on bushes, as well as the harvested balls piled on sheets and spread out to dry at the roadside. There are market gardens everywhere, and lots of fruit orchards. But the major impression is of maize or corn. In one place on the road we passed a huge wagonload of maize stalks pulled by a man on a bike — totally dwarfed by the load — with another man at the back keeping the wagon on a more or less straight course. The purpose of all this activity is not immediately clear. What happens to the maize, and what is it used for?

One soon realizes that the Han Chinese are farmers above all else, but it is difficult for a foreigner, especially a non-Chinese-speaker, to make contact with village communities. Those who would like to get closer



to the land and the people who work on it would be well advised to take an organized rural village tour.

In Shandong, China International Travel Service (CITS) arranges visits of varying lengths — from a half-day tour to a week's stay — in a village in Anqiu County south of Weifang. The village is Shijiazhuang: a pioneer in the concept of rural visits for foreign tourists, opened in 1983. Although it is quite obviously a 'model' village, it is typical of local communities in its basic lifestyle.

A good road, widened and resurfaced in 1987, leads from Weifang to the county town of Anqiu, just before which you cross the River Wenhe ... now a dried-out riverbed. This is the prime agricultural area of Shandong, but it is currently plagued by severe water shortages. The farmers living in small villages on either side of the new road ignore its existence totally, riding their bikes slowly straight across it without a glance or, it seems, a thought for the oncoming trucks and other traffic. Or else they colonize it for their own purposes. In places, a line of large, jagged chunks of rock informs vehicles that the road is no longer theirs and they are

forced to retreat to the 'soft shoulder' — an earth strip. The smooth surface has proved ideal as a crop sunning and drying area.

Beyond Anqiu itself, the road westwards becomes narrower and is shaded on either side in typical manner by mature willows and poplars. Here again, both sides of the road are given over to drying tufts of cotton, to peanuts and more peanuts, as well as to the ever-present corn or maize cobs. Women sit, often cuddling a gap-panted baby, to supervise their patch, turning the crops to ensure even drying.

And then, at last, we turn into an even narrower avenue lined by tall plane-trees. The rich golden-yellow of the corn cobs stands out against the newly ploughed ribs of the lush brown earth. The sun dapples the road through the trees. This is the approach to Shijiazhuang.

First stop is the tourist reception room in the village's administrative centre. A local cadre explains, with some pride, how the village has been completely rebuilt — we were shown the 'before' and 'after' pictures at a later stage. In 1989, the village had 260 households, a population of 1,230 and 1,190 mu (around eighty hectares) of farmland.

There have been gradual but definite improvements in the villagers' life over the last forty or so years. Irrigation and an increase in crop yields were the major changes which enabled them to overcome drought and flooding. However, since 1978, the villagers have been implementing the new policies for rural areas and have thus set up industries such as a rabbit and chicken farm, flour mill, brickyard, cement factory and plastics factory, as well as a new nylon zip fastener plant (with equipment imported in



Photo by Jenny Marsh



1987 from west Germany) and various sidelines such as farm machinery repair workshops, woodwork shops, etc. The result is that eighty percent of the village workforce is employed in the rural industries and only twenty percent in agriculture.

The new housing retains the traditional architecture but incorporates internal improvements. Most of the houses are single-storey but there also a few two and three-storey ones. Communal amenities include a free kindergarten, a youth centre (which holds evening classes but also has a games room and a rifle range), a clinic and a store. Every household has running water and some also have solar heating and indoor bathrooms and toilets — still a luxury for families in the Chinese countryside.

Next to the reception centre is the Folklore Museum and Folk House, a good place to gain some idea of life in the Shandong countryside from the late Qing to the early 1950s. The single-storey buildings around the courtyard are thatched in the traditional way. Exhibits are laid out in rooms according to theme. In one room you will find spinning wheels and looms and a colourful mural

called 'Four Seasons Farming' showing the processes involved in producing silk and cotton. Another is decorated as though for the New Year festivities, walls hung with pictures of deities, offerings laid out on the household altar. Folk arts and crafts are clustered in the neighbouring room with papercuts, clay figurines, embroidery, wooden moulds for shaping cakes, New Year pictures, and kites. Traditional entertainments — in another room — include exhibits connected with dragon lanterns, stilt-walking, land boats and lion dancing.

The Folk House is surprisingly spacious. Its ceilings are covered with hand-printed paper in bright motifs, there are papercuts at the windows, and the promise of a cosy winter with the wide kang (heated brick bed). The house is laid out as though to welcome a bridal couple, and sometimes the villagers re-enact a traditional wedding ceremony here for tourists, I was told.

Outside, the quiet main street and every side lane glow with the gold of ripe maize, the cobs meticulously graded according to size and quality. It is not just the road surface and the pavements which are used for

drying; cobs are piled in woven bamboo silos, line window sills and every ledge, dangle from the trees like strange fruit.... Strolling on the village outskirts we discover great stacks — not of hay or straw but of maize stalks.

So what is this maize used for? My queries garnered various replies. The corn cobs go to make cooking oil, margarine.... The stalks are dried, bundled and built into stacks. At a later stage they are beaten vigorously to crumple them into small pieces which are then compressed into 'bricks' and used for fuel.

Visitors will obviously see different aspects of the rural cycle depending on the time of year. When we were there, the fields were bare and being prepared for the next sowing. Thus we also had the chance to see a fine team of plough-horses in action as well as a surprising number of spanking-new tractors. (Elsewhere in Shandong, the more common sight is 'mixed teams' consisting of mules, donkeys, oxen, horses, in any and every combination, or anything up to six adults and children hauling a simple plough.)

But the highlight of a trip to Shijiazhuang



is the actual time spent in a village household. Our hosts were the Wu family: Wu Shuchao, his wife, his mother and his two young sons: one just twelve month's old, the other a lively eight-year-old. Wu Shuchao's mother, who cooked the excellent lunch to which we all sat down together, informed us that she has no less than eight grandchildren. The family lives in a two-storey house — part of a terrace of houses — entered through a small courtyard. There are two rooms plus bathroom and kitchen downstairs, while the 'best' bedroom — now a guestroom — and the eating area are upstairs.

The people of Shandong are typically big, bluff, hearty people and their hospitality is proverbial. We were offered apples and fresh, raw peanuts to break the ice, but lunch followed almost immediately. The main dishes were an interesting mix of sweet and savoury, said to be typical of Shandong village fare. Treated as honoured guests, we were served beef with noodles, candied walnuts, chicken, more peanuts (this time roasted), lotus roots, and slices of radish sprinkled with sugar. There were also several dishes fried in batter: freshwater fish, stuffed potato slices, stuffed green beans, and pork and vegetable balls. The *pièce de résistance* was an enormous bowl of ravioli-like dumplings filled with a cabbage and pork mixture.

Despite Shandong's reputation for adventurous eating habits — fried crickets and scorpions being some of the choice morsels



we were offered elsewhere on a tour of Shandong, not to mention the redoubtable hotpot reminiscent of a witch's cauldron known as Chaotianguo (Heaven-Facing Pot) consisting of every possible part of a pig bubbling gently in donkey soup — there were no surprises and no drawbacks for the faint of heart at this lunch! Except for its gargantuan dimensions....

Apparently, Shijiazhuang also offers a week-long hospitality programme for foreign students of Mandarin who stay in the village to practice their language skills. I envied them! This option, like many others, is arranged through the Weifang branch of CITS.

Weifang itself lies on the 'neck' of the Shandong Peninsula. The territory under its jurisdiction stretches from the Bohai Sea in the north almost to the Yellow Sea in the south. Weifang's good hotels make it a comfortable base for trips into the countryside, including to the Shanwang Museum in

Linqu County where 189 varieties of fossils about fifteen million years old have been unearthed. However, visitors should note that few trips would be easy without the back-up and transport facilities offered by CITS.

Weifang is probably most famous for its kites and its International Kite Festival held every April, and it is great fun to visit an old kite-making workshop in a village about ten kilometres to the east. This village — Yangjiabu — is also a centre for New Year pictures, the bright pictures on traditional auspicious themes hung up in Chinese homes to bring good fortune in the coming year. Its leading light is a true master craftsman of the old school who still uses woodblocks dating back to the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). This visit is a 'must' on any itinerary, and easy to fit in with a half-day trip to Shijiazhuang.

Jenny Marsh

Photos by Lam Kin Fai

The Pleasure of Cycling Around Taihu Lake in Summer

In July of last year, I decided to leave my work behind and brave the summer heat by going on a bicycle trip around Taihu Lake near the border of Jiangsu and Zhejiang Provinces. Besides seeing the scenic landscape around the picturesque lake and experiencing the colourful cultures of the two provinces, I could also stop and swim in the lake whenever I liked. No doubt this is the best way to drive away the summer heat.

The following is an account of my experiences during the trip. It can serve as a reference for those who are interested in touring the famous Taihu Lake on a bicycle.

First of all, select the type of bicycle suitable for climbing slopes and cross-country riding. Such bicycles have wheels that are twice as wide as those of ordinary bicycles, making them more durable and safe when running on sandy or rocky paths.

People who travel in the southern part of the country during mid-summer should remember to keep out of the fierce sun around noon time. The best time to ride is during mornings and evenings as the weather



Photos by Er Dongqiang

is cooler despite the bright sunshine. In the afternoon, you can take a nap, visit indoor tourist spots or have a nice cup of tea at a teahouse on the shaded shore of the lake. And be sure to eat and drink enough as travelling on a bicycle, especially in hot weather, demands more of one's physical strength.

When I was cycling on moonless nights using a torch on unlit roads, I would slow down. When there were no other vehicles on the road, I moved to the centre and, instead of fixing my eyes on the road, would raise my head and look up into the sky. It is actually much safer for cyclists to steer with their eyes guided by a strip of star-studded sky seen between the branches of the roadside trees. This way you can be sure not to end up falling into one of the ditches that line the road. When cars drove up from behind, I took advantage of the headlights to pick up my speed.

However, if you are riding on small village paths, it is much safer to keep both feet on the ground and push your bicycle.

You should also remember to bring enough changes of clothes, such as sweat shirts and shorts, and to keep them clean to prevent skin irritation.

Ointments that soothe skin irritation, sun screen and insect repellent were the indispensable items from the medicine chest that I brought along with me and was happy to have.

If you decide to swim in the lake or in a nearby river, first enquire about the condition of the water to ensure that it is safe to swim in.

Translated by Ursula Yeung



Transport Tips for Visitors to Yunnan's Hutiao Gorge

Hutiao (Tiger Leap) Gorge is a twenty-kilometre section of the Jinsha River on the upper reaches of the Yangtze River, lying in the Lijiang region of northwestern Yunnan Province.

Well known for its danger, Hutiao Gorge winds between the snow-covered peaks of Yulong Mountain on the east and the Haba Mountain on the west. While the highest mountain at the magnificent Three Gorges of the Yangtze is only 1,500 metres above the river, that of the Hutiao Gorge exceeds 3,000 metres, making it the deepest gorge in the world.

The most imposing part of Hutiao Gorge is the section between Daju and Xiaqiaotou.

Besides having previous mountaineering experience, visitors to the gorge should also carefully consider transport arrangements and time management when planning their itinerary. For example, you can start your journey from Daju and move downstream along the gorge to Xiaqiaotou. The all downhill journey is relatively easy since it demands less physical strength. However, the bus to Daju leaves Lijiang only every five days (at 7 a.m.). Thus, if you miss the bus, you will have to wait five more days or change your plans.

The other route is to go uphill from Xiaqiaotou to Daju. Besides being a great challenge to one's physical capability, the major disadvantage of taking this route is that you may have to wait for days to catch the bus back to Daju. The waiting is not only a waste of time, it also kills the fun of travelling. So, whether you choose to climb up or coast down, be sure to check the bus schedules of both places as soon as you arrive at Lijiang before deciding which route to take.

Fortunately, I was able to catch the bus from Lijiang to Daju on the same day that I arrived and did not have to go through the trouble of checking bus schedules.

The bus I took arrived at Daju around noon. After getting off the bus, I headed towards Daju Village to find a safe spot to cross the Jinsha River. The point of crossing was not easy to locate since the Jinsha River flows through Daju in an S-shaped course and the crossing point changes from time to time.

Boat service across the river is usually available from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day. However, if you have not been able to cross the river by 4 o'clock in the afternoon, you should probably postpone your trip until the following day as it is dangerous to walk the gorge after nightfall. Incidentally, the fares for crossing the river change with the type of passenger: the locals are charged one yuan,

Cantonese two yuan, tourists from Hong Kong and Macau three yuan, while foreign visitors are expected to pay from five up to 30 yuan.

After reaching the opposite bank, follow the mountain path leading to a small village where you can ask villagers for the directions to Hutiao Gorge which is two kilometres from the village. Once you have reached Hutiao Gorge, proceed downhill along the river to Xiaqiaotou. The path is long and will take ten hours or more even for experienced hikers, and you are unlikely to finish the whole journey in one day. After walking for about four hours, you will come to a small hotel named 'House', a simple and unadorned guesthouse. The charge per bed is three yuan and meals are served. However, you should not expect too much quality in the food provided by this small hotel in this remote mountain area. In the morning, you can finish the rest of the journey, which will take about six or seven hours. It is important that you arrive at Xiaqiaotou before 2:30 p.m. so as to catch the bus going back to Lijiang. You can, of course, choose to spend the night in the town and board the bus to Lijiang at 7 o'clock the next morning.

The following are some points to remember when touring Hutiao Gorge:

(1) Visitors should be extra careful since the gorge is perilous. The winding path on the slope of the gorge is narrow with a steep slope on either side. Since some sections of the path have been destroyed by landslides, hikers are often required to find other paths in order to continue their trek.

(2) Visitors should wear good hiking boots

and bring enough food, water and warm clothes. Besides the House hotel, there is no other place along the way where you can find food and water. You can ask your hotel in Lijiang to look after your belongings that are not required for Hutiao Gorge. The small service charge is well worthwhile.

(3) If your bus does not arrive at Daju in time for you to cross the river, you can spend the night in the Hutiao Gorge Guesthouse in the village. The charge is one yuan per bed.

(4) The weather is dry at Hutiao Gorge which is located at a high altitude. Affected by a static electricity phenomenon, the fully automatic camera that I carried with me on the trip failed to function properly. As a result, I could make prints from only two of the five rolls of films I used and the quality of the pictures was far from satisfactory. The camera, however, returned to normal after I went back to Kunming. If you plan to bring along a fully automatic camera, you should wrap it in a piece of flannel, if possible, to prevent it from malfunctioning.

(5) In Sanba Village, Zhongdian County, which is twenty kilometres from Xiaqiaotou, there is a spectacular touring site called Baishuiyan Crag, as imposing a landscape as that of Huanglong (Yellow Dragon). However, since bus service is still unavailable, people who want to visit can reach there only by walking. Baishuiyan Crag is about two days' journey from Xiaqiaotou and there is no accommodation along the way. Hopefully, transportation to Baishuiyan will soon improve.

Kan Pui Fat

Translated by Ursula Yeung



Photo by Liu Qijun

Labrang Lamasery — Practical Tips



Photo by Er Dongqiang

Labrang Lamasery is located in Xiahe County in the Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in southwestern Gansu Province at an altitude of around 3,000 metres above sea level.

Getting There

From the provincial capital, Lanzhou, accessible by domestic flight or by rail, take the daily long-distance bus which departs at 6:30am. After a stop for lunch in Linxia, the bus arrives at Xiahe around 4pm.

Lodgings

The best lodgings in Xiahe are at the Labrang Guesthouse, built in the traditional Tibetan style. Rooms here cost 35 yuan per night. This is a clean hotel with hot water in the bathrooms, but it is set in the suburbs and, with no regular bus service to the centre, is therefore not the most practical choice for independent travellers.

However, there are several hostels and travel agencies in Xiahe which rent out rooms. One of them is the Military Services Reception Centre which also accepts tourists — each bed in a two or four-bed room costs 6 yuan per night. This is very close to the lamasery as well as to shops. It provides water and a brazier for heating, but facilities are basic. It may also be possible to find lodgings with the monks.

Shopping

There are many places selling antiques in Xiahe, with Tibetan artefacts at more reasonable prices than in, say, Lhasa. Bargaining is, however, obligatory! Since few foreign tourists are seen at Labrang, everybody will be very eager to sell you something.

N.B. If you intend to visit the lamasery at the time of the New Year celebrations as featured in our article, be warned that you will need to provide (and cook) all your own food, since most of the shops close for the duration. February 15, 1991 is the first day of the next lunar new year. It would be a good idea to arrive several days beforehand and stock up with provisions as well as a few cooking pots, etc. If you are lucky, you may be invited into a Tibetan or Hui home and have the chance to try the local fare — butter tea, *zanba* (roast barley flour), barley beer, and so on.

New Year Activities

The following is a rough guide to the religious ceremonies and activities at Labrang Lamasery during the New Year period, which includes the Monlam Festival.

Er Dongqiang

| Date | Special activities |
|---|--|
| 1st day of New Year (Feb. 15 1991) | At dawn, the first sunrise of the new year is greeted |
| 2nd day of first lunar month (Feb. 16) | Monks' sweets-distributing ceremony |
| 3rd-5th days (Feb. 17-19) | No special activities |
| 6th-12th days (Feb. 20-26) | Morning: Monlam Festival proper with prayers, teaching, debate (climaxing on the 12th) Afternoon: ceremony of blessing, sprinkling of holy water (From the 9th day onwards, ceremony of prayer to escape the 'bitter sea') |
| 13th day (Feb. 27) | Sunning of the Buddha (on the slope opposite the lamasery) |
| 14th day (Feb. 28) | Sacred dances |
| 15th day (March 1) | Butter Lantern Festival |

Recently, two landscape novelties have been discovered in Beijing and Leshan, Sichuan and they are both related to religion. The 'Jingshan Sitting Figure' in Beijing features the most respected Taoist god sitting cross-legged, meditating, while a gigantic Buddha has been found peacefully sleeping in Leshan, Sichuan Province.

The Jingshan Sitting Statue

In January 1987, the Chinese National Surveying and Charting Council announced that a picture taken of the overall layout of the landscape of the Jingshan Park in Beijing shows that the park had been laid out to represent a human figure sitting cross-legged. The figure was later named the 'Jingshan Sitting Figure'. The different parts of the figure were identified as follows: the group of buildings comprising the Shouhuang Palace at the northern part of the park form the head, the grand palace and main entrance form the eyes, nose and mouth of the figure with its smiling face and squinting eyes, while a rich growth of pine and fir trees make up the beard, shoulders, chest, arms and legs.

In 1989, a researcher into the martial arts which originated around Wudang Mountain, Hubei Province, pointed out that the 'Jingshan Sitting Statue' and the 'Zixiao Sitting Statue' at Wudang Mountain were both diagrams illustrating the Taoist theory for preserving health and life. The Zixiao Palace compound and its surrounding landscape were designed with reference to the features of the human body. A comparison of the two landscapes helped to unfold the mystery of the 'Jingshan Sitting Statue' which is supposedly the Taoist god Zhenwu. He wears an ornamented headpiece, has a beard and sits with his hands joined in front of him. The figure was built in the style typical of a Taoist god and certainly bears a close resemblance to Zhenwu.

The 'Jingshan Sitting Figure', was built during the era of Chengzu, the founding emperor of the Ming dynasty (reign dates 1404-1424). He explained that it was with the help of Zhenwu that he was able to gain control of Nanjing and become ruler of the country. Shortly after Chengzu became emperor, he decided to show his gratitude to the Taoist god by ordering the landscaping of Jingshan in the form of Zhenwu.

You might wonder why the image of the Taoist god is used in the diagram illustrating the method to preserve life and yet is kept

Two Hidden Spectacles: The 'Jingshan Sitting Figure' in Beijing and the Gigantic 'Sleeping Buddha' in Sichuan



Leshan's 'Sleeping Buddha', with his head on the right (by Zhang Liangyin)

hidden from most people. The teaching and theories of Taoism are profound and complex and developed around the major principle of attaining everlasting life. Guided by the Taoist philosophical concept of the 'union of man and heaven', practitioners engage in cultivating and improving their moral character, finally reaching a state of immortality. Taoist practitioners are required to pass on to others the secret of attaining immortality, but, at the same time, they must maintain an aloofness from material and worldly pursuits. The 'heavenly secret' could not be leaked to the common people. Non-practitioners were told that only those who were determined and dedicated to pursuing the Taoist truth would be able to understand its wisdom. That is why the 'Jingshan Sitting

Figure' was not discovered until 500 years after it was completed.

The Gigantic 'Sleeping Buddha'

On May 11, 1989, a 62-year-old man from Zhonghe Village in Guangdong Province was visiting Leshan in Sichuan Province. On his return journey aboard a boat, he took a final shot of an ancient pagoda standing on the disappearing coastline. A couple of weeks later he was showing the pictures of his Leshan trip to his friends. While they were admiring the picture of the pagoda, he suddenly discovered that the mountains in the picture resembled a well-built man lying on his back. Looking closely at the head of the man, he could see distinct facial features and even read the expression on the face.

The picture was passed from hand to hand, and eventually as many as 500 people saw it. They were all amazed that the photo clearly showed a Buddha whom they called the 'Leshan Giant Buddha'.

A survey team was later sent out by the Department of Culture of Sichuan Province to conduct an on-site observation. However, since the exact location of the place where the picture was taken was unknown, the survey team had to spend about a month searching before they found Fuquanmen where they were able to take profile pictures of the gigantic Buddha. From Fuquanmen on the riverside of Leshan, you can see the stalwart body of the huge Buddha sleeping on the bank of the Qingyi River. With the streaming river rippling by, the body of the Buddha seems to be moving up and down. The Wuyou Mountain, Lingyun Mountain and Guicheng Mountain are the head, body and feet of the Buddha. Studying the head — the Wuyou Mountain — you can see that the rocks on the mountain, the flourishing bamboos, the shade, the mountain trails, the pagoda and the temple appear to be the Buddha's hair, his round and full forehead, his long eyelashes, the straight bridge of his nose, his slightly opened lips and the strong lower jaw, so much like the real Buddha.

The magnificent Lingyun Mountain range, comprising nine peaks spread out as the Buddha's broad shoulders and chest, his abdomen and legs. The feet of the Buddha, resting at an angle to the ground, are part of Guicheng Mountain. The Sleeping Buddha is tremendous, with its 4,000 metre length. His body is well-proportioned and strong, looking natural and at ease. The details of his face are especially impressive.

What is even more amazing is that the well-known 71-metre-high Leshan Buddha sits in the centre of the Sleeping Buddha's chest. Sitting against the chest of the Sleeping Buddha, the Leshan Buddha looks delicate, calm, and undisturbed. The scene coincides with the Buddhist saying that 'Buddha lives in one's heart'.

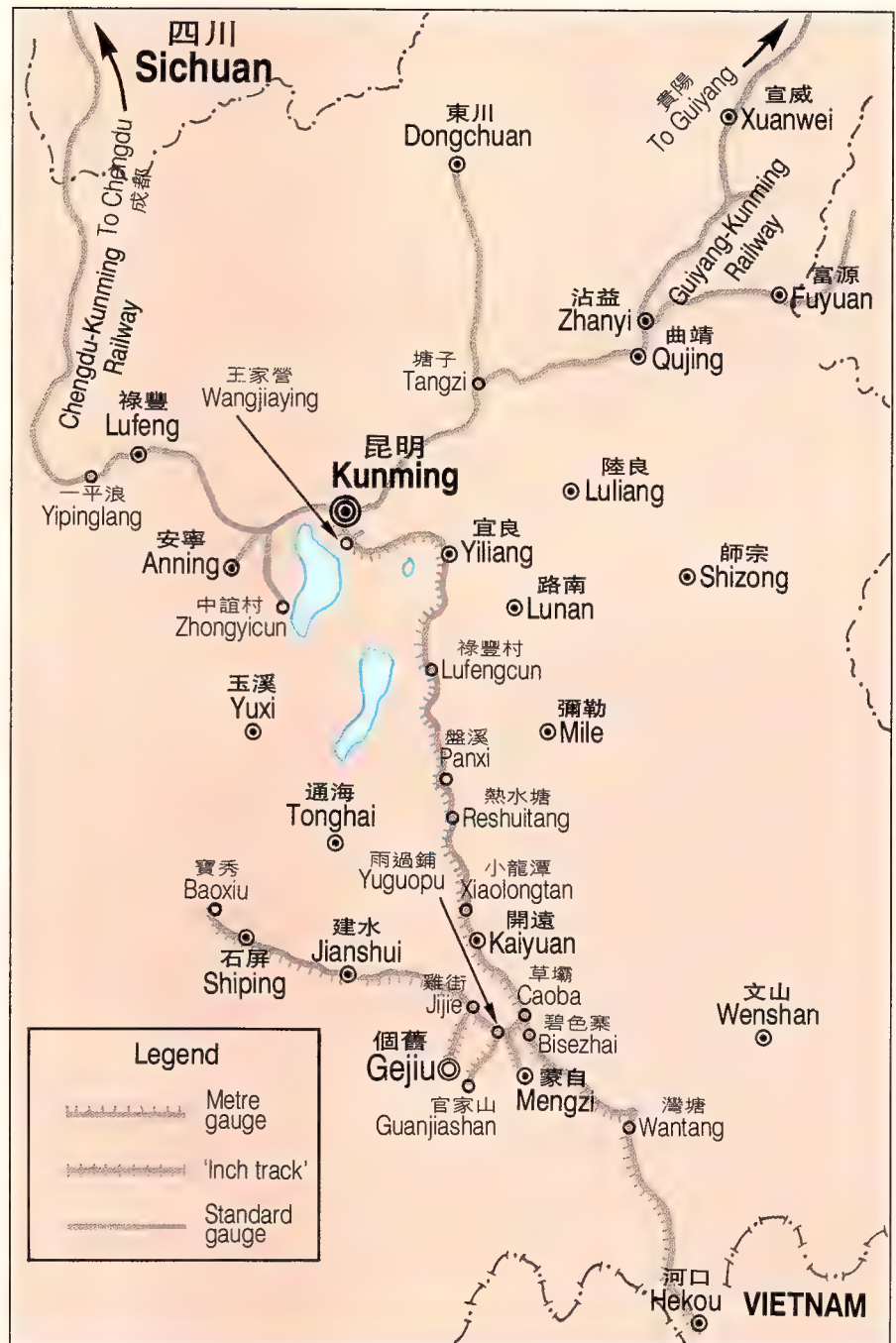
Black and white film is the best choice if you want to capture the spectacular Sleeping Buddha. The best time for taking pictures is under a sunny and yet slightly misty sky. It is in such weather, with the river rushing by below and the clouds floating across the sky, that the gigantic sleeping Buddha seems to come alive.

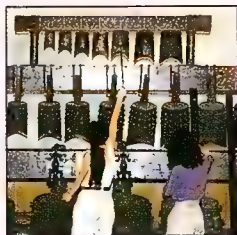
Translated by Ursula Yeung

Railways of Yunnan

Yunnan has three different kinds of railways. The first is the standard gauge type (1.435 metre wide) built over twenty years ago: the Chengdu-Kunming and Guiyang-Kunming lines. The second is the metre-

gauge railway that stretches for 672 kilometres. The last is the 0.6-metre-wide railway, known as the 'inch track', which is only 33.9 kilometres long. The last two are described in detail in our Special Features section.





(Continued from page 59)

The Hong Kong-Beijing Coach Tour

dancers wore archaic costumes, the dancing was glamorous, the lighting spectacular. The evening's programme included a warriors' dance with male dancers wearing animal masks, and sections from a dance drama, *The Floral Shower on the Silk Road*.

ZHENGZHOU

Yellow River Cruise

We drove back via Luoyang to Zhengzhou, capital of Henan, where we stayed the night on the seventeenth day. But first we visited the Song-dynasty tombs in Gongxian County. Seven of the nine Northern Song (960-1127) emperors were buried here. The tombs have deteriorated with the passage of time, leaving only the 'spirit way', two rows of stone

statues of deities, horse and beasts standing guard along each approach path. Some of these stone sculptures are three times life size, and there are still around seven hundred of them.

After arriving in Zhengzhou, we took a motorboat cruise on the Huanghe (Yellow River). Looking up as the boat sailed below the steel railway bridge which spans the river, we were overwhelmed by its size. The mighty Huanghe flowed by at immense speed, coloured a muddy yellow by the silt it carries down from its upper reaches. In the middle of the roaring waters stood a small island bearing a rich growth of vegetation.

SHIJIAZHUANG

Across the Boundless Plain

We sped north on the eighteenth day, stopped to explore the ruins of the capital of the fourth century B.C. state of Zhao, at Handan in southern Hebei before moving on to Shijiazhuang, the provincial capital, on the following day. We were still some distance from the latter when we were met by a welcoming party and a with a motorcycle escort which cleared the road for us and led us across the boundless plain to the city. It was the first time that we had received such overwhelming courtesies.

Shijiazhuang is relatively close to Beijing, but the people there are far more 'countrified' than the residents of the national capital. Western-style clothing has only recently caught on. However, the primary school pupils we ran into carried themselves with poise. When they caught sight of our party, they dismounted from their bicycles to take a closer look at the bunch of 'foreigners' and were self-assured when we invited them to have their picture taken with us.

We were also surprised to see a performance comparable to a rock concert that evening. The young musicians, with long hair swaying, played their guitars and sang while jumping around on stage in the local stadium — very much like their counterparts in the West.

BEIJING

Beijing the Unique

We arrived at our final destination — Beijing — on the twentieth day. It was the pull of this great city which had prompted our individual decisions to travel thousands of kilometres across China. From what we saw as we entered it, we felt that

the roads, the public squares, the palaces and markets were all on a larger-than-life scale. Scattered throughout the city are many skyscrapers and hotels built in recent years.

That evening we tried the most famous local dish — Peking duck. Although it was the first time some of my foreign companions had tried it, they fell in love immediately with the colour, smell, texture and taste of the roast duck and the manner of eating it rolled in pancakes.

The next day (the twenty-first day of the trip), we mounted the Tian'anmen Gate, then toured the Forbidden City. Although we had all seen pictures and heard stories about it, it is only when you actually set foot inside the palace of the Ming and Qing emperors that you appreciate how the architecture, furniture, decorations and layout of the buildings and courtyards reflect the lifestyle of the 'sons of heaven' who enjoyed immeasurable power yet kept themselves separate from ordinary humanity.

Another highlight was the Temple of Heaven — a unique structure built in a vast open space surrounded by trees. This was where the emperor came to pray for rain and favourable weather for the crops every year.

On the following day, the twenty-second day after setting out, we went to the Great Wall. There is a common Chinese saying that someone who has never climbed the Great Wall cannot qualify as a hero; we were all heroes that day! Being able to stand on the ramparts at Badaling and see to the far horizon was in itself reward enough for the tiredness accumulated over the strenuous three weeks or so of travel.

That evening we watched a spectacular acrobatic show. A female weightlifter supported on her shoulders two long poles on which acrobats, both male and female, threw somersaults and walked and jumped as though they were on flat ground. The last item on the programme was an electrical dragon which danced and twirled ... a fitting close to our journey of over three thousand kilometres across this 'land of the dragon'.

By the way, this was only the first experimental run. Apparently, if all goes well, similar overland coach tours can be expected between Beijing and Ürümqi, Ürümqi and Lhasa, and Hong Kong and Chengdu.

Translated by Ursula Yeung

Shanghai Trade Fair

Shanghai will host the first East China Export Trade Fair next March and more than 12,000 overseas business people will be invited. The fair, to be held from March 5-14 in the Shanghai Exhibition Centre and in the newly-built Shanghai Centre, will replace the former Shanghai Trade Fair which was held on eight previous occasions. This year's fair will be jointly sponsored by the cities of Shanghai, Nanjing and Ningbo and by Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui and Jiangxi Provinces.

Suzhou Street at Summer Palace

To up date our report in CHINA TOURISM no. 99, the renovation of the so-called Suzhou Street at Beijing's Summer Palace has now been completed. Constructed by the Emperor Qianlong (reign dates 1736-1795) to remind him of the scenic beauty of Suzhou in Jiangsu, the area on the northern side of Wanshou (Longevity) Hill was burned down in 1860 by the invading French and British armies. The reconstruction, 300 metres long, has eight bridges and around sixty small shops, covering an overall area of 2,870 square metres. Arranged along waterways, the complex can be approached from Lake Kunming as well as on foot.

Prehistoric Art in Fujian

Chinese archeologists have discovered over 100 pieces of prehistoric rock painting in more than 30 locations in Fujian Province. According to research from the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology, the paintings range in age from 3,500 to 10,000 years.

The paintings reveal hoof marks, the moon and stars, snakes, hand and foot marks and other symbols and pictographic characters which reflect the superstitions and religious beliefs of the artists. Experts have pointed out that Zhangzhou rock art is similar to primitive rock art found in Taiwan Province and in the Hawaiian Islands of the United States.

Xishuangbanna Tourist Fair

Nine provinces and region: Fujian, Guangdong, Guangxi, Hunan, Hubei, Sichuan, Guizhou, Hainan and Yunnan have joined with the China Travel and Tourism Administrative Bureau to present China's Nine Southern Provinces/Region Folk Customs Tourist Fair 1991 from April 11-15. The venue for the fair is at Xishuangbanna. This exhibition will present the latest travel and tourism developments in the region. All international tourist organizations are invited.

Winter Hotel Rates in Beijing

From now through March 31, some Beijing hotels are offering inducements to the winter traveller. For example, the Palace Hotel, a member of the prestigious Peninsula Group, is offering a 40 per cent discount from the regular room tariff and 50 per cent off the regular suite rates. Elsewhere in Beijing, the ITT Sheraton, as part of its winter Silk Road package, is offering reduced room rates as well as other extras such as late check-out and complimentary use of both the health club and the swimming pool.

Hu Qingyu Tang, a Chinese Pharmacy Museum

Hangzhou, in Zhejiang Province, will soon open a Chinese pharmaceutical museum which undoubtedly will be of interest not only to medical professionals but to the general public as well. The new museum is on the site of the Hu Qingyu Tang, a pharmacy constructed during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). The pharmacy is magnificent, with its thousands of porcelain jars, herb drawers, hand-carved panelling and shelves of fine sculpture.

Near the beginning of the museum tour you will find a history of the development of traditional Chinese medicines. The second section of the museum tells about the life of Hu Xueyan, founder of the pharmacy. He enlisted a team of the leading physicians of his time to conduct experiments. He also selected 400 or so proven formulae from which he manufactured medicines.

Apart from visiting the workshops, visitors to the museum will be able to try their hands at the traditional manufacturing tools. There is also a restaurant catering for diet therapy and a clinic in which famous doctors are on hand to see patients who can have their prescriptions filled on the spot.

Mudanjiang Customs Established

This October saw the official opening of a new customs post at Mudanjiang in Heilongjiang Province in China's far northeast. Located on the middle reaches of the river of the same name, Mudanjiang is a developing industrial city with many export-orientated enterprises. It is linked by rail via Suifenhe with the port of Vladivostok, the administrative centre of the Soviet Union's Primorsky (Coastal) Territory. Cross-border trade in the north-east has increased immeasurably since 1982.

Qionghua Festival

In honour of the *qionghua*, a rare white flower indigenous to its area, the city of Yangzhou in Jiangsu Province will host the second China Yangzhou Qionghua Festival from March 2 through 8.

The Festival will feature an array of programs and exhibitions, including an economic and trade fair, a display of traditional arts and crafts, *qionghua* displays and a flower arranging contest. There will also be a seminar on the Eight Yangzhou Eccentrics, a group of famous Qing dynasty painters, and, for those more concerned with the present, there will be a food fair as well.

Living in a Tujia House

The Tourist Bureau of the Longshan County of Hunan Province has organized a new trip for the more adventurous travellers as well as for those travellers who are especially interested in the lives of the indigenous people. The itinerary offers the opportunity of briefly living with the Tujia people. Participants will be able to stay in a traditional Tujia stilt house and share the lives of these people of southern China.

Trip to China-Vietnam Border

The travel agency, China Travel Service (Hong Kong) Ltd., has announced a new tour to the China-Vietnam Border. The tour, starting in December 1990, offers a four day trip. There are two flights a week direct from Hong Kong to Nanning in Guangxi. From there, travellers fly on to the border region between China and Vietnam. Starting in February 1991, China Travel Service will offer additional trips covering the Soviet, Korean and Burmese frontiers.

SEVENTH COIN SERIES

Seventh Coin Series

Late last October, the People's Bank of China issued its seventh series of one gold and four silver coins. China's national emblem is shown on the obverse of all the coins. On the reverse, the gold coin bears a likeness of Emperor Taizu (reign dates 1368-1398) of the Ming dynasty. The silver coins feature Zheng He (1371-1435), the Ming admiral who made seven great voyages; Luo Guanzhong, who lived in the fourteenth century, author of *The Three Kingdoms*; Li Shizhen (1518-1596), the physician and herbalist who wrote the *Compendium of Materia Medica*; and Li Zicheng of the seventeenth century, leader of a rebel uprising which brought down the Ming dynasty but was suppressed by the Qing.

MUSEUM OF OVERSEAS COMMUNICATION HISTORY

Museum of Overseas Communication History

Quanzhou in Fujian was one of the four largest ports in China by the Tang dynasty (618-907) and the second largest port in the world during the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), exporting silks, satins and spices to India, Arabia and the east coast of Africa. This was Marco Polo's 'Zaytun', one of the Chinese centres of the 'Silk Road of the Sea'.

Something of Quanzhou's illustrious trading and seafaring past is preserved in its Museum of Overseas Communication History. Exhibits include the hull of a Song dynasty seagoing junk, Moslem relics (there was a thriving community of Arab traders here), and pottery and porcelain for the export trade.

ORIENTAL APOLLO FINDS

Oriental 'Apollo' Finds

Believed to be one of the major archaeological discoveries of recent times in China, painted terracotta figures of men and boys in large numbers have been unearthed in the course of an excavation of an imperial tomb near Xi'an, capital of Shaanxi Province.

The over 300 figures found so far were taken from the third and fourth pits of a group of 24 pits to the southeast of the tomb of the Han dynasty emperor Jingdi (reign dates 156-141 B.C.) and his wife. The tomb is located 22 kilometres due north of Xi'an. The pits, which are about twenty metres apart, are seven metres deep and four metres wide, and vary between 25 and 291 metres in length. In all, the pits cover an area of 96,000 square metres.

NEXT ISSUE

SOUTHERN CHINA

Guangdong, Guangxi and Fujian in southern China can easily be reached from Hong Kong. With convenient transportation, they are particularly suitable for short trips. In this issue we introduce some of the best.

- The Silk Road of the Sea — A Visit to Quanzhou
- The Lovely Wuyi Mountains
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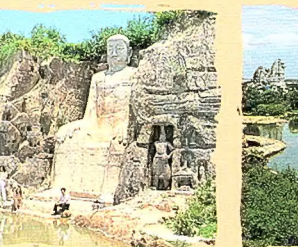
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